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Allegainces

In memory of Eric.
May StarClan light your path always.

SUNCLAN

LEADER **Dawnstar**- Golden brown she-cat with green eyes

DEPUTY **Cinderflame**- Dark gray she-cat with amber eyes

MEDICINE CATS **Pebblestep**- Gray and white she-cat with blue eyes

Honeyfrost- Golden and white she-cat with blue eyes

WARRIORS *(toms and she-cats without kits)*

Icepetal- White she-cat with blue eyes

Snowtail- Fluffy white she-cat with blue eyes

Redclaw- Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Adderstrike- Silver tom with lighter tabby markings and dark blue eyes

Lionclaw- Golden tom with amber eyes and abnormally large claws

Goldenleaf- Golden she-cat with green eyes

Turtleblaze- Mottled brown tom with green eyes

Yarrowtail- Fluffy, pale gray tom with pale green eyes

Flamepetal- Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Brackenpelt- Dark ginger tom with amber eyes

Cloudspots- Fluffy gray and white tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Burnpaw

Rosewind - Ginger she-cat with a white tipped tail and green eyes
Apprentice, Hollypaw

Briarrose - Small brown she-cat with amber eyes

Earthpelt- Brown she-cat with white chest and paws with green eyes

Mudfall- Dark gray tom with green eyes

Flashtail- White tom with green eyes

Falconheart- Golden Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Larkthorn- Dark brown she-cat with green eyes

Dovepool- Silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Petalbreeze- Silver she-cat with white tipped ears and blue eyes

Sedgefern- Fluffy gray she-cat with green eyes

APPRENTICES *(more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)*

Hollypaw- Ginger she-cat with green eyes (Goldenleaf and Redclaw's daughter)

Burnpaw- Ginger tom with green eyes (Goldenleaf and Redclaw's son)

QUEENS *(she-cats expecting or nursing kits)*

Squirreltail- Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Cherryleaf- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes, nursing Cloudspots's kits (Snowkit, white she-cat, Windkit, gray she-cat and Bluekit, blue-gray she-cat)

Fawnheart- Light brown she-cat with lighter spots on her flank and pale green eyes, nursing Turtleblaze's kits (Bramblekit, brown tabby tom and Maplekit, mottled golden-brown she-cat)

Heatherflight- Light brown she-cat with green eyes, expecting Flashtail's kits

ELDERS *(former warriors and queens, now retired)*

Sandfoot- Tortoiseshell she-cat with distinct ginger paws

Crowfur- Black she-cat with blue eyes

Rainears- Black she-cat with white ears and blue eyes

ASHCLAN

LEADER **Riverstar**- Blue gray she-cat with blue eyes

DEPUTY **Stormheart**- Gray tom with dark green eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Blackstorm** - Black tom with blue eyes

WARRIORS

Harewhisker- Light brown tom

Petalshine- Silver and white tabby she-cat

Foxfeather- Ginger tabby she-cat with green eyes

Haresong- Light brown she-cat with green eyes

Lilyclaw- Gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Ravensong- Black tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Puddleclaw- Gray she-cat with green eyes

Skyfeather- Silver tabby tom with black markings and amber eyes

Nightheart - Black she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes
Apprentice, Sagepaw

Leafdawn- Mottled brown she-cat with green eyes

Dustfall- Pale brown tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Hailpaw

Rabbitspring- Pale brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Primroseheart- Mottled ginger she-cat with green eyes, former rogue

APPRENTICES

Hailpaw - Pale silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes (Daughter of Puddleclaw and Stormheart)

Sagepaw - Gray tabby she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Puddleclaw and Stormheart)

QUEENS

Silvermoon- Silver tabby she-cat with blue, nursing Ashblaze's kits (Slatekit, dark gray tom, Dewkit, pale gray she-cat and Mistkit, gray she-cat with blue eyes)

ELDERS

Cloverstrike- Brown tabby she-cat with green eyes

Nightstorm- Dark gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Crowstep- Gray tom with with black paws and amber eyes

MOONCLAN

LEADER **Shadowstar-** Black tom with yellow eyes

DEPUTY **Violetfur-** Dark gray she-cat with bluish-purple eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Oneflight-** Silver tabby tom with icy blue eyes

WARRIORS

Pigeonpelt- Light gray tom with pale yellow eyes

Feathercloud- Fluffy white she-cat with blue eyes

Shadeflower-Black and gray she-cat with amber eyes

Swiftheart -Gray tom with green eyes

Tallsong - Dark gray she-cat with blue eyes

Ebonywing- Black she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes

Brokenclaw - Dark gray tabby tom with amber eyes

Icepool-White she-cat with dark blue eyes.

Ashfeather- Black she-cat with blue eyes

Daisyheart- Silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Breezetail- Black and white tom with blue eyes

Rainpetal - Black she-cat with blue eyes eyes

QUEENS

Frostfire- White she-cat with pale gray flecks and green eyes, nursing Pigeonpelt's kits (Ferretkit, speckled brown and white tom, Mothkit, white and gray she-kit and Swankit, fluffy white she-kit)

Mosswind-Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes, nursing Swiftheart's kits (Minnowkit, silver she-cat, Shellkit, speckled gray tom and Meadowkit, tortoiseshell she-cat)

ELDERS

Brambleflight-Dark brown tom with green eyes

Ravenwing- Pretty dark gray she-cat with dark blue eyes

Dovestorm- Light gray she-cat with pale blue eyes

LICHENCLAN

LEADER **Timberstar**- Brown tom with amber eyes

DEPUTY **Larkclaw**- Brown tabby she-cat with a white tipped tail.

MEDICINE CAT **Roseheart**- Pale ginger she-cat with green eyes

WARRIORS

Twigheart-Small light brown she-cat with green eyes

Heatherwind- White and black she- cat with blue eyes

Brackenheart-Red-brown tabby with a light brown chest

Foxtail- Ginger tom with a white tail
Apprentice, Kestrelpaw

Flamewhisker- Ginger she-cat
Apprentice, Briarpaw

Seedclaw-Black and white tom with green eyes

Flowerheart- Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

Stumptail- Small brown tom with amber eyes

APPRENTICES

Krestlepaw- Brown she-cat with green eyes

Briarpaw- Pale brown she-cat with green eyes

QUEENS

Leafsong-Light brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes, nursing Foxtail's kits (Dapplekit, brown spotted tabby and Emberkit, ginger she-cat)

Rowanwhisker-Dark red-brown she-cat with dark green eyes, expecting Stumptail's kits

ELDERS

Maplepool- Brown and cream she-cat with amber eyes

Mousethorn - Long haired brown tom with green eyes

Owlheart-Brown tabby she-cat with green eyes

[image]

Prologue

Dead leaves crunched beneath Falconclaw's paws, the smell of dead plants filled the air and he flicked his tail in annoyance. He could hear voices through the broken trees, he stepped into a vast hollow with several cats sitting around a murky pool of water. One of the cats was Thornstar who had the former AshClan warrior Echoheart at his side. Since Echoheart joined the Dark Forest she had done nothing but follow Thornstar around like a love-sick hare, it was incredibly annoying.

Echoheart was fierce, but she was destroyed by her own attachments and emotions, like many of the cats in the Dark Forest. The other cats there were Thrushclaw, Thornstar's son, and Oakpelt, the old SunClan warrior.

"Look who decided to show up." Thornstar spat. "And you yell at me for always being late."

Falconclaw ignored Thornstar's comments and sat down. "Is Nightheart still ignoring you?" He questioned.

Thornstar nodded. "She's not going to train with me again, she's a lost cause."

Falconclaw flicked his tail. "For now, maybe." *I have a plan.* "Falconheart will still train with me when I approach him, but it's getting harder to convince him to follow me and my teachings. He's become far too nobel."

"So what now?" Thornstar lashed his tail. "Our plan isn't really working."

"Perhaps you can take up training new cats, be better this time." Oakpelt suggested.

"I've thought about it. My grandkits are young, they could prove to be great allies to us. Or even Ashblaze's kits. From what I've seen,

Slatekit is very tempermental."

"That's an option," Falconclaw raked his claws across the dead earth beneath them. "But first, we need to show these cats what happens when they turn their backs on us." He rasied his voice. "All of you failed in your pursuits because of your attachments," He rested his eyes on Thornstar. "You never lost your love for other cats, no matter how many lives you ended." He bared his teeth at Echoheart. "You were driven on a pointless quest for revenge and died to a medicine cat."

Echoheart hissed sharply. "I killed Applespots."

"Congratulations." Falconclaw mewed dryly. "You killed an old queen who wasn't even one of your original targets. Truly a ruthless legend."

Echoheart spat again but Falconclaw ignored her. "My point is," He continued. "Both Falconheart and Nightheart have attachments. They love their families, and Nightheart has a mate. It won't be long until Falconheart sees his feelings for a *kittypet*." He spat the word "kittypet", it didn't matter how many generations ago Dovewish had given birth, her kittypet blood would forever taint SunClan.

"So you're saying threaten the ones they love." Thornstar swayed his tail. "Is that it?"

"Threaten and more." Falconclaw curled his lip, his claws ripping at the grass. *It's been so long since I've taken another cats life. Even in this rotting forest, the desire has never left me.* While Falconclaw had been alive, he had hidden his desires deep inside of him, always threatening to tear out of his body and shred the cats around him, but he kept his claws in until the right times. "Honeyfrost and Blackstorm may be protected by StarClan, but Sedgefern and Rabbitspring are not. If Falconheart continues to stray from his path then I'll happily rip that kittypet apart before his very eyes."

"Nightheart won't stand for such a thing," Echoheart grumbled.

"What was that?" Falconclaw asked dangerously, he hated this stupid she-cat and her desire to have the last word in. "Don't tell me

you still care for your daughter?"

Echoheart shook her head. "I don't, I never did care for her or her brother but Nightheart shares my drive, she has a strong sense of duty." Darkness flashed across Echoheart's murky green eyes. "Just like I did. She won't let you simply kill Rabbitspring, she'll put up a fight."

"Then I'll kill her too." Falconclaw rolled his eyes. "I fear no cat, I never have and I never will."

"Weren't you scared of some kittypets or something? That's why you *failed* to kill Flowerstar. The only cat you managed to kill was some old tom." Thrushclaw chimed in, Thornstar's son didn't often speak but when he did he always sounded like an idiot.

"I was never *scared* of kittypets, I *hated* kittypets. They're weak and vile and they continue to taint SunClan's bloodline." Falconclaw explained, glaring Thrushclaw down. "And Owlfoot was far from the only SunClan cat that I killed."

Falconclaw had kept his secrets deep down for many moons, not even Thornstar knew of the things he did in his youth. "Who did you kill?" Thornstar questioned, curiosity flowing through his amber eyes.

"I don't feel like starting story time." Falconclaw stood up. "Oakpelt, walk with me. I want to talk to you about something."

Oakpelt nodded and the two Dark Forest warriors ventured away from the hollow. "You are one of the few cats who I sense is similar to myself. You killed Ravenwing because he was breaking the warrior code and was about to become mates with your sister, correct?"

Oakpelt nodded. "I would've killed my sister and those disgusting kits as well but I was unable to."

Falconclaw nodded slowly. "I want *you* to pay a visit to Falconheart soon," He explained.

"Why is that? I have no interest in training SunClan cats. I left that

behind when I died."

"I don't want you to train him," Falconclaw continued, flicking his tail. "I want you to *scare* him. He thinks he's brave and tough, but he's never encountered a true killer such as yourself, and I want you to drive that deep into his mind. *Terrify* him."

"What exactly will this accomplish?" Oakpelt narrowed his eyes, the tom was right to question Falconclaw.

"Honeyfrost is protected by StarClan, and if I ever want to truly destroy Falconheart then I must get to her. If Falconheart is scared enough, then he will go to his mother for help. They'll bring StarClan to *us*."

"Training these warriors is the choice of you and Thornstar, what do I get out of this?"

"You have a strong distaste for cats breaking codes, so if you do this for me," Falconclaw curled his teeth back, he could feel energy surging in his paws. *Blood is on the horizon, waiting to be spilled.* "I will allow you to kill Honeyfrost, rid the forest of one last traitorous medicine cat."

Oakpelt stopped walking for a moment, darkness and joy filled his dark eyes. "You really know the way to a cat's heart, Falconclaw." He placed his paws on a dead oak tree, dragging his claws down the trunk, shredding the bark. "Very well, Falconclaw. You have a deal."

Chapter 1

The air was filled with the rich scent of prey, the sun shimmered across the forest floor. The scent of squirrel was the strongest, the plump creature was at the base of an oak tree, digging up some small seeds for its meal. Little did it know what was hiding in the brush. Falconheart's breath was silent, his paws ready to pounce. Another pair of eyes caught his from behind the squirrel, Sedgefern was prepared to catch the squirrel as Falconheart readied himself to pounce.

Falconheart steadied his hunting crouch, the squirrel had no idea what was about to happen. As quick as a viper, Falconheart shot out of the brush, claws out and teeth bared. The squirrel knew that it wouldn't be able to get up the tree so it ran straight away from Falconheart's claws and directly into Sedgefern's.

She killed it with a swift bite to the next and mewed a quiet thanks to StarClan. "Great catch!" Falconheart praised his friend, she looked up at him with shimmering green eyes.

"You did all the work."

"I know." Falconheart puffed out his chest and joined Sedgefern. "But you still a great job."

Sedgefern rolled her eyes playfully and nudged him. "Come on, we should head back before we have too much prey to carry. I bet Redclaw and Goldenleaf have plenty as well." Falconheart agreed and the two of them backtracked to retrieve the rest of the prey they had caught during their hunting party. Together the two of them had caught four squirrels, two mice and a sparrow.

With the arrival of greenleaf, SunClan was flourishing along with the forest. The storms had finally come to an end with the defeat of Echoheart nearly two moons ago. Prey was plentiful and SunClan had full bellies. The river had returned to its normal state and MoonClan had peacefully returned to hunting in their own borders.

From what Shadowstar reported, they had also returned to their original camp now that the flooding was over.

Peace remaind between AshClan and SunClan, and Falconheart had never felt happier in his life. His family and Clan was safe, the forest was full of prey and new kits were bound to arrive any day. *Everything is perfect in SunClan.* Falconheart thought and looked to Sedgefern as they carried they prey back to camp. *And I have her to share it with.* Sedgefern and Falconheart grew closer with each passing day, and his feelings for her had begun to overwhelm him.

I want to tell her so badly. Falconheart thought, he figured that she felt the same way about him but something was scaring him, something deep down that didn't allow him to tell Sedgefern how he truly felt.

The right moment will come. Falconheart told himself. *And then everything* will *be perfect.* Falconheart and Sedgefern met up with Goldenleaf and Redclaw and the small hunting patrol returned to camp. As usual in greenleaf, life in SunClan was busy in the camp.

Cinderflame was talking patrols with several warriors, the elders were sunning themselves outside and sharing tongues. From the nursery Cherryleaf watched Bluekit, Snowkit and Windkit play moss ball with each other. *They'll be apprenticed soon.* Falconheart had been itching to be one of their mentors, but he wasn't sure if it would happen. *I can only hope, I suppose.* He knew that Dawnstar picked mentors not based on experience or if they had already had one or not, she would pick the mentors she thought would train each kit the best. Falconheart *really* hoped he would be one of them, he had been dropping hints for quite a while that he wished to be a mentor, he just hoped that Dawnstar trusted him enough to mentor one.

Falconheart noticed that Heatherflight wasn't sunning herself like she usually did, he knew that the queen had been complaining of pain and nausea, Pebblestep assured the Clan that she was fine, some queens just struggle with pregnancy more than others. Still, it didn't stop Flashtail from worrying.

Maplekit and Bramblekit were two moons old now and eagerly

watched the three older kits play, the two of them had boundless energy and Fawnheart often left them with Turtleblaze to play.

Falconheart wondered for a moment if he would ever have kits. At the thought his heart began to beat a little faster. *I have to stop being such a coward and tell Sedgefern how I feel first.* Falconheart reminded himself. Pulling his attention away from the nursery, Falconheart set his prey down on the fresh-kill pile.

"I promised Dovepool and Petalbreeze that I would share fresh-kill with them." Sedgefern explained. "I'll catch you later, Falconheart." She purred affectionately and gathered with her sisters near the SunStone to share a squirrel.

"My oh my," A deep voice spoke behind Falconheart, he turned to see his father approaching. "That cat certainly likes you."

His pelt began to burn and he shuffled his paws. "Yeah--I guess."

"Don't be coy with me, Falconheart." Lionclaw chuckled. "I can see that you like her as well, so why aren't the two of you mates yet?"

"I don't know." Falconheart admitted. "I'm just waiting for the right moment, it feels like something is holding me back right now."

"Me and your mother never had to decide to be mates." Lionclaw explained. "We just grew closer and closer until it was undeniable. You are Sedgefern are starting to get that way, the whole Clan can see it."

"I just don't want to ruin anything." Falconheart sighed. He watched Sedgefern with her sisters, he almost had once before. *And there's still something she doesn't know about me.* He thought painfully. *Is that's what holding me back? Is it Falconclaw?*

"She's admired you ever since you were an arrogant apprentice." Lionclaw assured him. "She still likes you, she always has." He gazed towards Dawnstar who was approaching Cinderflame. "Your mother was the same with me, I was an arrogant apprentice but she always saw through that. She supported me when I needed her most, and she helped me grow up. Just ask yourself this,

Falconheart. Has Sedgefern done that for you?"

I was an arrogant apprentice, I did a lot of stupid things. Falconheart thought. *When I killed Ashblaze I nearly let it consume me. She's the only cat who was able to bring me back from that darkness, and even though we fought she still cares for me.* "She has." Falconheart admitted.

"No cat will force you to become mates with her." Lionclaw continued. "Whenever you do find the right time, I know you make both Segdefern and yourself very happy. That's what matters, Falconheart, never forget it."

Falconheart was grateful for his father's advice, but he still didn't feel like it was the right time. "Thank you." Falconheart rested his tail on Lionclaw's back. "You truly are becoming a wise old owl." Falconheart teased.

"Watch yourself." Lionclaw sneered. "I still have all the energy of a kit, even though raising *you* aged me about fifteen moons."

"Clearly the most challenging part of your life."

"You have no idea." Lionclaw playfully shoved his son. "I hope whenever you have kits that one of them is even more arrogant than you."

"I'm sure they will be." The two of them shared a laugh together and Lionclaw returned to Dawnstar. *I'm glad my family is so supportive.* He thought fondly. He looked towards the medicine cat where Honeyfrost was probably hard at work organizing herbs yet again. He knew that his sister struggled with the fact that she had to kill Echoheart, but she seemed to be adjusting.

Echoheart is defeated. Falconheart reminded himself. *SunClan is at peace, prey is running through the forest and I'm happy.* He told himself once again. *But what about Falconclaw?* His training sessions with the warrior were few and far between, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to continue with them any longer. *I need to break away from him, then I can truly be happy.*

Chapter 2

Honeyfrost sniffed through her herbs looking specifically for certain herbs. She grabbed some feverfew, fennel, chamomile and sorrel. She grabbed the bundle of herbs gently in her teeth and left the medicine cat den and padded across the stone hollow to the medicine cat den. She carefully crossed the mass of wrestling kits and focused on Heatherflight.

The Queen was in the back of the den, looking exhausted. Her belly was swollen with her future kits, but the pregnancy had been incredibly hard on her. After about a moon of expecting Heatherflight was complaining about constant pain and nausea. She could barely handle her prey so she had been relying mostly on herbs to keep up her strength.

"Here you go Heatherflight." Honeyfrost mewed, setting the herbs down in front of her nest. Heatherflight lifted her head.

"What do we have today?"

"Feverfew and fennel as usual for the pain, and sorrel to help with your hunger but I decided to give you some chamomile as well. It builds strength and helps relax the heart and mind." Heatherflight had been incredibly worried about the state of her kits, so Honeyfrost hoped that the chamomile would help her.

"Thank you for all you do for me, Honeyfrost." Heatherflight purred. "I just want these little kits to be born already." She sighed happily and closed her eyes. Honeyfrost turned away with fear digging into her belly. She could do nothing but pray that Heatherflight's kits would be born happy and healthy, but she hadn't seen a pregnancy like this before. Both Cherryleaf and Fawnheart had easy pregnancies with the exception of some hip pain on Fawnheart's side.

I just have to keep up hope. Honeyfrost told herself. *I'm her medicine cat, it's my duty to make sure that her kits enter this world safely.*

Honeyfrost stepped back into the medicine cat den, Pebblestep was out gathering herbs so it was just her for the time being. Inside the den was dim, as Honeyfrost stepped inside something caught her eyes.

Lurking in the back of the medicine cat den was a shadowed figure with dark, unmistakable murky green eyes filled with hatred. Honeyfrost let out a sharp gasp and jumped backwards, her heart falling to her paws. The eyes were gone and Honeyfrost remained alone in the medicine cat den. *It was nothing.* Honeyfrost told herself and gingerly stepped farther into the medicine cat den.

Even though the threat of Echoheart had been washed away in the river as her body was dragged through the rushing water, the image of her face still haunted Honeyfrost. The guilt of taking another cats life clawed at her with each passing moment, she played it off like she was okay, like nothing was bothering her, but her dreams raged with the storm of guilt and fear.

Echoheart's body had been found farther down the river by a LichenClan patrol, she had been buried in the unclaimed territory by Riverstar. Even though she was gone, Honeyfrost couldn't get her out of her head. *It will pass.* Honeyfrost told herself. She didn't reach out to her friends or family, she didn't want them to know how much she was struggling over something so stupid. *They've all had to take lives and they went on just fine. I'll get over this, I know I will.*

Honeyfrost heard panicked mews from outside her den, she quickly rushed out of her den with her fur standing on end to see what was going on. Mudfall was leaning against Brackenpelt, blood was pouring from a wound on his paw. Honeyfrost ran to her Clanmates. "What happened?"

"We were hunting on the stones between the rivers," Brackenpelt explained. "Mudfall climbed on the stones and tripped, he cut his paw really bad."

"Take him to the medicine cat den so I can take a look." Honeyfrost beat them back to her den and quickly began gathering the herbs for treating Mudfall's wound. Brackenpelt and Mudfall arrived and Mudfall sat down, lifting his paw with a wince. Honeyfrost looked

over his paw, there was a very deep cut in his paw pad that was pouring blood.

"Hold your paw there." Honeyfrost instructed and picked up a damp ball of moss to clean up some of the blood around the wound. She then quickly chewed together some marigold and rubbed it on the wound, the proceeded to wrap the wound with several layers of cobweb. "That should hold for now, I want you to stay here at least for tonight so I can keep changing the dressing."

"How long will it take to heal?" Mudfall questioned looking painfully at his wrapped paw.

"Only time will tell. It will heal faster if you rest, I'll give you some poppy seeds for the pain." Honeyfrost nudged four poppy seeds towards Mudfall who lapped them up. He curled up in a nest and closed his eyes to sleep through the pain. It was a simple injury, but if not taken care of it could get infected.

Honeyfrost stepped out of the den to give Mudfall some peace and quiet and was shocked to find herself nose to nose with Dovepool. "Is he okay?" She sounded really panicked. *Am I missing something?*

"He's fine, Dovepool." Honeyfrost stepped back from her. "The wound is pretty deep, but with time and rest he'll be able to get back on his paws. He just needs rest."

Dovepool sighed with relief. "Glad to hear it." She purred. "Thank you, Honeyfrost." Dovepool turned away, leaving Honeyfrost confused. *Are those two...a thing?* She questioned, she guessed she really didn't pay too much attention to which cats were becoming mates.

"How's my brother doing?" Earthpelt questioned, approaching from the warriors den. Even Dovepool seemed more concerned than Earthpelt.

"It's a deep wound, but he'll recover from it."

"Good." Earthpelt purred. "It might do him some good to be confined to a nest for a while." She purred playfully and walked

away eventually. Honeyfrost's stomach growled, she had been so preoccupied with other things she hadn't had a chance to eat today. She padded up to the fresh-kill pile and picked up a mouse.

She quickly ate and as she finished, Pebblestep entered camp with a jawful of herbs. Honeyfrost stood up and approached her mentor. "Mudfall fell while hunting on the stones, he's resting in our den."

"How bad is the wound?" Pebblestep questioned, setting down her bundle of herbs.

"Pretty deep, we'll just have to keep an eye on it to prevent infection. He'll probably be off duties for a moon at the most."

"I'll take a look at it when he wakes up, for now I want to put these herbs away." Honeyfrost followed her mentor, taking some of the herbs from her to help out. Together, the two medicine cats quietly sorted their herbs.

"Have you given Heatherflight any herbs today?"

Honeyfrost nodded. "I decided to give her some chamomile as well, I'm hoping it will help her."

"That was a good call." Pebblestep purred. "I didn't even think of that." Honeyfrost felt warmed by her mentor's praise, she just hoped that the chamomile would help.

"I'll visit with her tomorrow to see if it helped. I just want these kits to come so she will be able to recover." Honeyfrost mewed. "I know she wants them here."

"Yeah," Honeyfrost could hear uncertainty in Pebblestep's mew. "Me too." *She sounds so worried.* Honeyfrost suddenly recalled the death of Pebblestep's mother, Dovetail. *She died giving birth and lost many kits. She's worried Heatherflight will suffer the same fate.*

Honeyfrost rested her tail on Pebblestep's shoulders. "Don't worry about her, she's in the paws of great medicine cats. She knows that we'll do everything we can for her, no matter how hard her kitting will be." Pebblestep looked at Honeyfrost with compassion in her eyes.

"Thank you, Honeyfrost." She sighed sadly. "I just worry, I don't want anything to happen to Heatherflight or her kits."

"We'll take care of them." Honeyfrost touched her muzzle to Pebblestep's shoulder. *They have to be okay. New kits would bring so much hope for SunClan. We won't let anything happen to you Heatherflight, I promise.*

Chapter 3

"Take these and get some rest, it should be able to help you. Come see me if the pain doesn't stop." Blackstorm instructed Primroseheart, nudging a small bundle of chervil towards the she-cat. She had been complaining about a bellyache for the past few days so Blackstorm gave her some feverfew in hopes that it would help. If it didn't, then Blackstorm would have to figure out what was actually bothering her, but he was certain the feverfew and some rest would help.

Blackstorm swept up some stray herb scraps with his tail and placed them into a pile. He continued to finish cleaning the rest of his den. When he finished he stepped out into the camp to get some prey. Life in AshClan was going well since Echoheart's defeat. Patrols had returned to normal. Not only was Echoheart gone, but there was a truce between AshClan and Sunclan which allowed AshClan cats to relax a little. Borders were still marked and patrolled each day, but there wasn't a constant sense of battle looming over the small Clan.

Outside the nursery, Slatekit, Mistkit and Dewkit were all wrestling playfully. The kits were rapidly outgrowing their nests in the nursery and would soon be made apprentices. Slatekit was the biggest and looked very similar to his father. He didn't share Ashblaze's tabby stripes but they had the same broad shoulders and amber eyes. *He'll be a fine warrior, as long has he keeps his ego in check.* Slatekit was quite boastful, often bragging and showing off for his sisters and the other cats in Clan.

His sisters were quite different, Mistkit was intelligent and sharp-witted while Dewkit was gentle and quiet. Together the three kept Silvermoon on her toes, but Blackstorm was certain that she would be excited to get them out of the nursery and on their apprentice duties.

As the day went on Blackstorm worked around his den, but there wasn't much to do. All injuries from the battle were healed and there was no sickness in the prime of greenleaf. Blackstorm was

grateful for the peace, but he was bored. He didn't have anything to do most days other than find different ways to organize his den and gather herbs.

Blackstorm stepped farther into camp, figuring he would get something to eat before returning to nothing. *Peace is nice and all.* Blackstorm thought, watching a hunting patrol vanish into the forest. *At least the warriors have something to do.* At this point he'd be excited if a kit stubbed their toe, at least it would give him something to do.

Blackstorm picked up a squirrel from the fresh-kill pile and sat outside his den, enjoying the sun on his black pelt. He took a bite of his prey and heard pawsteps padding up to him. He looked up to see Skyfeather, his former mentor. The pale tabby had his own prey, a sparrow, in his teeth. "Hey there, mind if I join you?" He questioned through the bird.

"Sure." Blackstorm nodded and let Skyfeather sit down beside him. The two of them hadn't spent much time together since Skyfeather returned to his duties as a warrior. "What's going on?"

"Nothing much." Skyfeather replied, biting into his bird. "Figured I'd share some prey with my apprentice, like old times."

"Hey," Blackstorm mewed sharply, but playfully. "I'm no apprentice anymore. When you get injured *you* have to listen to *me*."

Skyfeather laughed. "I suppose you're right." He spit out a feather and began toying with it. "It feels odd knowing that my own apprentice has more authority than me."

"This was *your* choice." Blackstorm teased.

"How are you handling it?" Skyfeather's tone hardened. *Is this why he's talking to me? Just to see if I can handle being alone?* Blackstorm thought for a moment. *I shouldn't be so wary, he was my mentor after all. One of the few cats who has always believed in me. I should be honest with him.*

"I was terrified at first." Blackstorm admitted. "I didn't think I was

good enough, I never thought I would be able to handle it, but with the support of others, I've been able to." Blackstorm thought to his sister, they had rekindled their sibling bond and it helped Blackstorm to find his paws again after spending so much time trapped in darkness.

Then there's Honeyfrost. After the battle, the two of them agreed to be friends and still be close despite not being mates. Blackstorm didn't think he would be able to handle it, but seeing her every half-moon and full moon was so much easier. She greeted him with bright green eyes and kindness instead of awkwardness and pain. Blackstorm still loved Honeyfrost, and always would. *I want to see you as someone I can depend on when SunClan needs help. I want to be friends with you, and maybe one day, when we meet in the stars; we can finally be together.*

Honeyfrost's sweet words rang in his mind with each passing moment, he dreamt of the day that could finally be together. He wasn't in a hurry to die, but neither was his love for her. *One day, and I'm holding onto that hope forever.*

"I will admit though," Blackstorm continued. "It is nice having a big den *all* to myself." He boasted.

Skyfeather let out a half-sigh half-laugh. "I will admit, that is probably what I miss most about being a medicine cat. I love being surrounded by Clanmates but Graypelt snores louder than any cat I've ever met. It's like sleeping with a badger! I don't know how Tetra puts up with it."

Blackstorm and Skyfeather shared a laugh at Graypelt's expense. In the two moons since Graypelt and his mate, Tetra were welcomed into the Clan they had found their place within the Clan. Graypelt had formed a new bond with his sister and grandchildren, though Blackstorm noticed that Harewhisker was still uncertain of his father rejoining the Clan.

Tetra, however, was instantly loved by the entire Clan. She was fierce and sharp witted. She had so many stories that the entire Clan could enjoy. She hunted hard and kept her paws busy at all times. It was strange having a cat with no Clan name but

Blackstorm was slowly adjusting to it.

AshClan is getting bigger and bigger. It had taken the Clan so many moons to rebuild after Thornstar, the countless deaths and losses made the Clan so small but with each passing season it grew stronger and stronger. Blackstorm knew it wouldn't be long until Tetra moved into the nursery, and he hoped more queens would as well.

Blackstorm and Skyfeather finished their prey while Skyfeather told stories of hunting and training, as well as how hard it had been for him to get back into it. Blackstorm was happy that he and Skyfeather could still be close even though they walked two different paths now. *Warrior or medicine cat, Skyfeather will always be my mentor.*

After Skyfeather finished his prey was selected to go on a border patrol, Blackstorm figured he might as well do *something* productive and headed out into the pine trees to gather more herbs. The only herb he could think was even a little low on was mallow. *The mallow will help Primroseheart as well if she still has a bellyache.*

Blackstorm ventured into the forest, despite Echoheart being dead and gone for two moons, he was still wary of every single noise and shadow that crossed his path. Too often he was reminded of when he and the elders were attacked. He missed Featherfall, he hoped that the old tom was happy in StarClan. *I wish I could've done more for you.* Blackstorm thought again for a countless number of times.

Blackstorm knew where mallow grew best, it was by the river border of the gathering hollow, close to the SunClan border. At least Blackstorm didn't have to worry about SunClan, the treaty with them had been the best part of Echoheart's battle.

Blackstorm reached the river, dipping his paws in for just a moment to cool them off from the greenleaf heat. He quickly caught the sweet scent of the mallow and noticed the herb growing in a large bunch just at the corner of the river. Blackstorm padded up to the plant and began picking the leaves carefully. *I'll have more than enough.* He thought happily, hoping that when leaf-bare reared its ugly head that he would have more than enough of all herbs.

Last leaf-bare the medicine cats were in terror because of our dying home, but now we have a whole forest full of herbs. Blackstorm would make sure that his Clan would not only survive leaf-bare, but thrive through the frozen season. *It's a long ways off, but still. It will be here before I know it.*

Just as Blackstorm was about to call it a day with his successful gathering, he heard pawsteps across the border, shifting leaves and fallen twigs. Blackstorm's body went rigid and he tensed, half-expecting Echoheart to step out from the shadows. What he did see, however, was a *much* prettier sight.

Honeyfrost.

Chapter 4

"This next move is a complicated one, are you sure you're up for it?" Nightheart questioned Sagepaw, her apprentice's eyes burned with a fierce determination.

"Absolutely!" Sagepaw boasted.

"Of course!" Hailpaw chimed in as well.

"This move is best suited for when you've got yourself pinned up against something with nowhere to run." Nightheart began and looked to Dustfall who nodded, preparing himself for Nightheart's demonstration. "Say that I'm fighting Dustfall and I'm backed into a wall." Nightheart looked her shoulder at the pine tree behind her. "Usually you would lash out and try and fight your way out of this, but if you do this right then you can take your attacker by surprise."

Nightheart leapt backwards using her front paws, as her paws hit the surface of the pine tree she used the surface to launch herself forward. Her body hit Dustfall's and his weight gave out, he slammed into the ground and Nightheart pinned him on his belly. "See? Now I've got the advantage."

"Wow!" Sagepaw mewed in awe. "That's so cool! I want to try!" She was incredibly eager to get started, and from the amazement on Hailpaw's eyes, she was too.

"You have to be quick." Dustfall explained. "When you feel your paws it the tree you have to jump off quickly, but with enough force that you'll be able to knock your opponent down. "

"Got it." Sagepaw nodded with determination, and Nightheart felt a surge of admiration for her apprentice. *She's so determined.* In the two moons that Nightheart had been training Sagepaw she had witnessed a cat with unrelenting resilience. She never gave up when she failed, and she would try over and over until she perfected was she was trying to do. *I'm so excited to see her grow even more.*

"Sagepaw you try first, you'll take turns." Nightheart and Dustfall cleared the area to give Sagepaw and Hailpaw enough room to practice the move. Sagepaw backed up against the tree, facing her sister. Sagepaw attempted to jump backwards, but fell short of the tree, just bumping her hindquarters on it and falling to the ground. Nightheart withheld a purr of amusement.

Hailpaw stepped up next while Sagepaw prepared to be tackled, Hailpaw's first attempt was similar, with her falling just short of the pine tree. Nightheart and Dustfall continued to give their apprentices advice while they made many attempts.

On Sagepaw's fifth attempt she managed to get her paws on the tree and actually launch herself off, she hit Hailpaw clumsily and the two landed in a tangle of limbs and laughter. "Good job." Hailpaw laughed and took her own next shot. She copied what her sister had done and landed on top of Sagepaw, knocking her to the ground.

"Good job both of you." Dustfall praised. When Sagepaw had first started training, she felt self-conscious of not being able to be as good as Hailpaw but with proper training, the two sisters didn't compete, they learned from each other. If one succeeded while one failed, they would give each other advice on how to improve themselves.

After a few more attempts, Nightheart could see that the apprentices were starting to get exhausted. "We should probably call it a day."

"Nooo." Sagepaw complained. "I still have some of my paws left to lose." She held up her forepaws, they had been scratched and worn down by the rough tree bark. It looked painful, but Sagepaw has such a strong determination on her face. Nightheart was so inspired by Sagepaw, but the apprentice needed her rest.

"Come on," Nightheart flicked her tail of Sagepaw's ears. "You need those paws treated, I know Blackstorm will have something for both of you. Tomorrow we'll work on partner fighting."

"Awesome!" Hailpaw exclaimed and the two of them began racing back to camp.

"I don't know how they do it." Dustfall mewed, exhaustion in his voice. "They train so hard, end up with scraped up paws and still have the energy to race."

"It's amazing really." Nightheart chuckled. "I don't think *I* had that much energy as an apprentice."

"They'll make amazing warriors when they're ready." Dustfall added.

"I agree." Nightheart purred and the two of them followed their apprentices back to camp.

By the time Nightheart and Dustfall returned to AshClan camp, Sagepaw and Hailpaw had already made their way to Blackstorm's den and were getting their paws treated. Nightheart spotted Rabbitspring sharing prey with Primroseheart in the center of camp. Nightheart felt her heart skip a beat at the sight of her mate. *Every time I see her.* She thought fondly.

Nightheart and Dustfall approached the two of them. "Welcome back." Rabbitspring purred loudly, it was like honey to Nightheart's ears. Nightheart touched her muzzle to Rabbitspring's and sat down beside her, their tails intertwining.

"How was training?" Primroseheart's eyes shimmered as she looked at Dustfall. *These two are as close as ever.* Nightheart thought fondly. *I expect kits from them soon.* She thought and Dustfall sat down beside Primroseheart, their pelts touching.

"Good." Dustfall replied, soothing down his fur. "Those apprentices have more energy than a hare being chased by a MoonClan warrior. Did you see Blackstorm about your bellyache?"

Primroseheart nodded. "He treated it, and I do feel better but I still don't have much of an appetite." She nudged her small mouse. "This is almost too much for me."

"I wonder if you have some kind of bug." Rabbitspring questioned, expressing concern. "You should really be getting some rest."

"I plan on it." Primroseheart took a small bite of her mouse, wrinkling her nose at it. She forcefully swallowed the morsel and

stood up. "I think I'll do that now actually." She turned away, making sure to touch her tail to Dustfall's pelt, the tom had the eyes of a love sick dove.

Nightheart and Rabbitspring shared a *look* and returned to it Dustfall. "What?" Dustfall rasped his tongue across his chest fur in embarassment.

"Nothing." Rabbitspring giggled and finished her prey. "I should get some sleep too."

"I'll meet you there in a bit." Nightheart told her. As Rabbitspring stood up, she ran her tail across Nightheart's flank just as Primroseheart had done. She cast a teasing look at her brother before vanishing into the warrior's den.

"Ha ha very funny." Dustfall snorted.

"I seem to recall you and a few other cats doing the same thing to me and Rabbitspring." Nightheart jagged him lightly with her forepaw. "Though it was *your* teasing that just us to finally admit what we felt. You should do the same thing."

"I plan on it, soon." Dustfall mewed. "I *really* care about her, I think she already *knows* how I feel." He shuffled his paws. "I hope she does anyway."

"I think she does." Nightheart assured him. "She looks at you the way Rabbitspring looks at me. Just stop being such a feather-brain."

Dustfall rolled his eyes mockingly at Nightheart and twitched his tail. Nightheart stood up and started heading towards the warrior's den. "You know, sometimes you don't have to tell someone how you feel. Sometimes, you both just know."

With those final words to Dustfall, Nightheart stepped into the den full of warriors starting to settle down for the night. Nightheart reached the nest right beside Rabbitspring and curled up next to her mate, rasping her tongue over Rabbitspring's ears while the small she-cat purred loudly. *Not a day goes by where I'm not happy I told Rabbitspring how I felt.* She thought. *She has made my life perfect.*

Chapter 5

Honeyfrost sniffed the marigold at her paws, it smelled lush and ready to be picked. She bit the flower off by the stem and carried onwards toward the river in hopes of finding some fennel. She could hear the gentle rushing of the water and through the trees spotted movement by the shore.

As she stepped out into the view she met the icy blue gaze of Blackstorm. As it did every time she saw him, her heart jumped up into her throat. "Good afternoon." Honeyfrost greeted kindly. Ever since the two of them agreed to be friends, seeing Blackstorm had become much more pleasant. She still got the butterflies raging through her stomach at the sight of him, but she was just as happy to call him her friends.

"Good afternoon." Blackstorm repeated after setting down a bright purple flower which Honeyfrost recognized as mallow. "What brings you to the river?"

"Oh you know," Honeyfrost purred. "Just topping off my herb supplies." She padded down the river bank, the only thing that separated them was the water. "The den is pretty full by now, but we can always use more."

"I agree." Blackstorm gave his mallow a sniff. "This is really the only thing that's not bursting out of my herb store, so I figure I should make it." The two of them shared a small laugh. "How are things in SunClan? Heatherflight give birth yet?"

Honeyfrost shook her head. "Any day I'm hoping, this pregnancy has been really rough on her."

"How so?" Blackstorm tilted his head.

"She constantly complains of a stomach ache and can barely eat or keep down prey. I'm worried about her." Honeyfrost admitted. "I just hope that the actual kitting is easier for her."

"Primroseheart has been complaining of the same symptoms..." Blackstorm said out, his voice trailing off.

"Has she been close with any toms lately?" Honeyfrost questioned. She could be expecting, though Heatherflight's symptoms didn't start until a moon into her pregnancy."

"She *has* been rather close with Dustfall I suppose." Blackstorm thought harder. "I guess I could check her out when I get back, I haven't been checking for signs of an expecting queen."

"I hope that's what it is." Honeyfrost added. "New kits are always a blessing." She purred. "I'm so excited to help Heatherflight's kits into the world, the last kits I helped deliver was Cherryleaf's and they're almost apprentices!"

"I feel the same." Blackstorm nodded. "If this is the case, then I'll be on my own delivering them."

"You can do it." Honeyfrost purred loudly and gratitude flashed in his eyes. "Well," She didn't want to end this meeting but she had duties to attend to. "I should get these herbs back before Pebblestep starts questioning."

Blackstorm laughed, the light in his eyes warmed Honeyfrost's heart. *For the past several moons I've only seen him look broken and sad, it's so nice to see happiness in his eyes.* "I'll see you at the half-moon, Honeyfrost." Blackstorm called happily and Honeyfrost began heading back to camp. She still felt the same way about Blackstorm, but coming to terms with their lives had helped her to live with the truth. *And we'll be together once we meet in the stars.* Honeyfrost reminded herself, her heart fluttering.

Honeyfrost reached the den where Pebblestep was already putting away the yarrow that she had gathered. "Good pickings." She nodded when Honeyfrost stepped in with a jawful of fennel and marigold. She sorted her herbs and lapped up some water to get the taste of herbs off her tongue. She had barely sat down when she heard panicked pawsteps racing towards their den.

"Honeyfrost! Pebblestep!" The voice came from Flashtail who

skidded to a stop in front of the den, kicking up some pebbles. "Heatherflight is kitting!"

Pebblestep and Honeyfrost shared a nod and Honeyfrost began gathering all the herbs they would need. *At long last! Please StarClan let this be an easy kitting!* Honeyfrost prayed and ran to the nursery with her herbs. Pebblestep was in the nursery and Fawnheart had passed on Maplekit and Bramblekit to Cherryleaf who kept her kits outside and out of the way.

"This hurts so much." Heatherflight whimpered, he claws tearing at the moss and bracken of her nest. "Is it supposed to hurt this much?"

Pebblestep nodded. "Every queen is different, but don't worry, Heatherflight. We'll take care of you. Flashtail, help keep her calm." Flashtail sat behind Heatherflight's head, licking her head and whispering calming words into her ears.

"Here," Honeyfrost pushed a large stick towards Heatherflight's muzzle. "You'll need this, trust me."

Heatherflight took the stick gently in her mouth and Honeyfrost turned her attention to Pebblestep. The medicine cat rested her paw on Heatherflight's stomach and a shadow of doubt crossed her face. *What's wrong.*

Honeyfrost wanted to ask her mentor, but she would just make every cat panic so she held her tongue. Heatherflight let out a sudden, shrill cry of pain, dropping the stick. "The stick." Honeyfrost reminded her and Heatherflight took the stick in her teeth again, biting down so hard the wood began to splinter.

"Just bare through it Heatherflight," Pebblestep spoke. "It'll be over before you know it."

Pebblestep continued to prep Heatherflight who let out several more cries of pain, Honeyfrost felt fear creeping into her heart. "It's time to start pushing, Heatherflight." Pebblestep instructed and Honeyfrost braced herself for the first kit.

"I can't!" Heatherflight wailed, clearly in agony. "It hurts!"

"You have to." Pebblestep urged. "Your kits need you to be strong, do you understand me? Push as hard as you can, I'm here to help you."

Heatherflight nodded shakily and Honeyfrost could see her entire body tense as she pushed. Honeyfrost could see the first kit starting to come. "Keep going, Heatherflight." Honeyfrost encouraged. "The first one is almost here."

As Heatherflight pushed, Honeyfrost could see the kit was coming out paws first. *This isn't good.* Honeyfrost would have to help the little kit out. "Keep going." She said once again, placing her paws gently on the half-exposed kitten.

Honeyfrost could hear the stick splintering moor as Heatherflight yowled in pain around it. At long last, the first kit was free. "Fawnheart, take this one I need to keep focusing on Heatherflight."

Fawnheart nodded without complaint and took the little kit, nipping through the sack and licking the little kit roughly along its spine. *Please let it be okay*.

The next kit was already on the way and in the same awkward position as the first. *Here we go again.* Honeyfrost's paws were covered in blood. *She's losing so much, we have to act quickly.* "Push hard, Heatherflight." Honeyfrost called. "You're almost done, I promise!"

Honeyfrost didn't think there would be any more than two, she hoped so at least. With some more painful pushes from Heatherflight, Honeyfrost got the second kit out. She very quickly took the kit and let Pebblestep work on stopping the bleeding.

"Are they okay?" Flashtail questioned with worry, Honeyfrost didn't respond she had to focus.

Honeyfrost ran her tongue along the kits fur, she had a little brown tom. *Please, StarClan.* No matter how hard Honeyfrost licked the kit, it didn't move or even squak. *No. StarClan please no.* Honeyfrost

didn't stop, she could see how hard Pebblestep was working on Heatherflight, she was alone in helping this kit.

"Honeyfrost." Fawnheart whimpered quietly. *Not that one too.* Honeyfrost looked to the helpless bundle of fur at Fawnheart's paws, she continued licking it but the little white kit didn't even twitch. Honeyfrost looked at the brown tom, his face was peaceful. *He never even got to open his mouth. I'm so sorry.*

"Why are you stopping?" Flashtail demanded of Honeyfrost, looking at his son. Honeyfrost could feel her heart shattering.

"There's nothing I can do, Flashtail." Honeyfrost's voice was low, she could barely contain her emotions.

Flashtail's eyes went wide. "N-no, there has to be *something!*" His eyes were filled with panic, Honeyfrost noticed that Heatherflight had gone quiet as well. "Pebblestep can you--"

"Shut up and let me work!" Pebblestep hissed, Honeyfrost could hear the urgency in her voice. *Please don't take Heatherflight as well.* Honeyfrost thought painfully, she kept the little kit close to her and the cats inside the nursery waited in painful silence until Pebblestep stopped.

She stepped back, her paws caked in blood. She breathed out a shaky sigh. "I stopped the bleeding." She mewed, her voice exhausted.

"My-my kits." Heatherflight spoke, her voice weak and trembling. "Where are my kits."

"I'm so sorry." Pebblestep's voice trembled, as did her body. *This isn't how this is supposed to go.* "Th-the kits didn't make it."

Heatherflight's body trembled and she let out a weak wail. "No...that can't be right. I worked so hard--they can't be dead!" She attempted to stand up but Pebblestep kept her down.

"You've lost a lot of blood, you need to rest."

"I want to see my kits." Heatherflight's voice was a slight growl to it.

Honeyfrost and Fawnheart shared an uncertain look but carried the two lifeless kits to their mother. They were placed at her belly, but didn't go for milk.

"Oh my kits." Heatherflight whimpered. "I'm so sorry, I'm so so sorry." She repeated the same phrase over and over, her voice weak and shattered.

Flashtail moved in close, resting his muzzle on his two dead kits. "My sweet kits." He breathed out. "I wish I could've met you."

The remaining cats in the nursery left the parents to grieve, Honeyfrost felt hollow and empty. *They didn't even stand a chance.*

Upon seeing them, Cherryleaf stood up and faced them she had clearly heard what went on inside. "How is Heatherflight? The kits?" Pebblestep seemed to broken to speak so Honeyfrost spoke in her stead.

"Heatherflight lost a lot of blood but she's alive and the kits--" Her voice broke. "But the kits didn't make it."

Cherryleaf flattened her ears. "That's so tragic." She whispered and pulled in her kits close, Fawnheart did the same. Honeyfrost looked to her mentor, Pebblestep's eyes were glazed over and she stared at her paws. *Is she in shock?*

"Come on," Honeyfrost nudged her mentor. Pebblestep lifted her head, she was responsive but there was something deeply bothering her. *I feel it too.* Honeyfrost helped her mentor back to the medicine cat den. Once they were secluded in their den, Pebblestep spoke.

"Delivering kits is the best part of being a medicine cat," She breathed out. "Which is why it hurts so much when this happens." Pebblestep sat down, slumping her shoulders and turning her back on Honeyfrost. Honeyfrost sat down beside her mentor, brushing her pelt against hers. "There's something we must understand as medicine cats," Pebblestep continued. "Sometimes, we have to make a choice, and our choices can cost lives."

Honeyfrost didn't understand what Pebblestep was trying to say.

"What do you mean?" She questioned.

"I've experienced this before." Pebblestep sighed. "This exact same situation." Honeyfrost once again recalled Pebblestep's mother. She died giving birth along with two of her kits leaving only Cloudspots. "When my mother gave birth to Cloudspots, I thought I had to give everything to him, Dovetail was strong. She could survive, she *had* to survive, but she didn't. Owlkit and Breezekit were born dead, just as these two were but Cloudspots still had a chance. Cloudspots lived, and my mother didn't." She sighed heavily.

"I never once resented Cloudspots, though. Only myself. When I found myself in this situation again, I thought about Dovetail. I realized as soon as the first kit came into the world that she was dead, and Heatherflight was bleeding out fast. I hated to leave you to helpless kits, but I knew that if I didn't put all of my focus on Heatherflight, she would die. Even if the kits *did* have a small chance, I still would have focused on Heatherflight." Pebblestep lifted her head, meeting Honeyfrost's gaze. Her good blue eye was filled with pain and guilt. "Heatherflight is still alive. Flashtail still has a mate, and Fawnheart, Brackenpelt and Flamepetal still have a sister.

"We will mourn the loss of these kits, and Heatherflight and Flashtail will be in pain for a long time, but in the future, they can try again. Heatherflight is here, and that's what mattered to me." Pebblestep dropped her head once more. "I hope you don't think less of me, Honeyfrost. I did what I had to do."

"No," Honeyfrost touched her muzzle to Pebblestep's cheek. "I understand why you did it." She really did understand, the loss of the two kits was tragic and would be felt for many moons, even longer for the grieving parents, but Heatherflight was still alive. She still had a chance for kits in the future. *Pebblestep did the right thing, I just wish all of them could've lived.*

"Thank you, Honeyfrost." Pebblestep mewed quietly and the two medicine cats shared a long moment of silence together. *Being a medicine cat isn't always. We can't save everyone, and we have to understand that, no matter how hard it may be.*

Echoheart's image flashed in Honeyfrost's mind once again. *I had to kill her, I know this. Just like Pebblestep had to choose Heatherflight over the kits. This is our destiny, our duty to our Clans. This is the life we chose.*

Chapter 6

Blackstorm quickly padded away from the SunClan border with a jawful of mallow and a racing heart. Not only had seeing and talking to Honeyfrost made his paws feel lighter than air, but he may have actually figured out what was bothering Primroseheart. He traversed the pine forest quickly, reaching AshClan camp in good time. He stopped in his den for a moment to deposit the mallow and rushed out of his den.

"Woah, there." Lilyclaw mewed as Blackstorm nearly knocked her over. "Where's the fire?"

"Have you seen Primroseheart?" He questioned, his eyes scanning the camp for the ginger she-cat. "I need to see her."

"I'm pretty sure she's out on patrol." Lilyclaw responded. "What's going on? Is she alright?"

Blackstorm nodded. "Yeah," He looked around. "I just need to talk to her about something, I'm not sure about anything yet." He had to impatiently wait for Primroseheart to get back from patrol, he hoped it wouldn't be too long.

While he waited, Blackstorm picked up a mouse from the fresh-kill pile and ate it quickly, his mind drifting back to Honeyfrost. He loved talking to her, and the pain of seeing her slowly faded away. Now he was back to when he was an apprentice, his heart beating out of control at the sight of her. *It hurts knowing that we won't be able to be together, but I still love seeing her.* Blackstorm thought happily.

Movement in Blackstorm's peripheral vision caught his attention. He lifted his head to see Primroseheart and her patrol returning from the forest. Blackstorm rose to his paws and calmly approached the she-cat, he knew that he had to stay calm or that she would panic. *Though if I'm right, this news should be welcome.*

"Primroseheart," Blackstorm mewed, getting her attention.

"What's up, Blackstorm?" She tilted her head.

"May I see you in my den for just a moment?" He requested.

Dustfall, who was part of the patrol, stepped forward beside Primroseheart. "Is everything okay."

"Yes." Blackstorm assured him. "I just want to take a look at something, I'll have her back to you in a little bit."

"Sure thing," Primroseheart purred and touched her muzzle to Dustfall's. "Save me some fresh-kill, will you?"

Dustfall nodded, but still seemed unsure. *If I'm right, I'm sure he'll be happy.* Blackstorm led Primroseheart into his den and instructed her to sit down. "So what's this about?" She questioned once she sat down.

"I think I may know what's wrong with you." Blackstorm replied and took a close look at Primroseheart. She looked bigger, like she had gained some weight. He stepped forward and placed a paw gently on her belly. She seemed weirded out but didn't move, her belly felt harder than it should have been. *Just as I thought.*

Blackstorm stepped back. "Primroseheart you're expecting kits."

Primroseheart's eyes went wide, filling with shock. "Wh-what? I'm expecting kits? Are you sure?"

Blackstorm nodded. "Positive."

A storm of emotions raged across Primroseheart's face as she processed the news she was just given. "I-" She stammered. "I didn't even know--" She looked up, the final emotion filling her eyes was joy. "Oh, Blackstorm thank you so much!" She jumped up to her paws and quickly corrected herself, as if she was scared she hurt her kits.

"I don't know why you're thanking me." Blackstorm chuckled. "You're the one with the kits, I just deliver the news."

"What do I do? How do I make sure that they're okay? What am I supposed to do?"

Blackstorm rested his tail on Primroseheart's shoulders. "Don't worry, that's what you need to do. Soon you'll move into the nursery and rest. Your body and the kits do all the work for you. I'll give you herbs to help and in two moons you'll have a bundle of kits to care for."

"Oh I'm so excited." Primroseheart purred loudly, waving her tail happily behind her. "Oh, I have to go tell Dustfall! And everyone!" Before Blackstorm could even speak, Primroseheart was out of the den and hurrying into camp. He stepped out behind her and saw that she had already reached Dustfall and was sharing the news.

Dustfall's jaw dropped but he quickly started nuzzling Primroseheart from nose to tail tip. For a moment, Blackstorm pictured himself and Honeyfrost in that situation. When they had been secretly seeing each other, the image was so clear. He had thought about it many times, but now, he just couldn't form the image. *I love her, but I know what's impossible.* He thought he would be sad, but he just *wasn't.*

The feeling was freeing for Blackstorm, he still loved Honeyfrost, but he didn't feel trapped or scared of his love. *I've accepted it, we both have. Now we can move forward.* Blackstorm's heart felt warm, it was such a wonderful feeling. *Long ago I felt as if my heart was frozen,* He stepped out of his den and overlooked the AshClan camp. His Clan was growing, soon Primroseheart would give birth to kits and AshClan would be even bigger. *And they all depend on me.*

From the kits, to the elders to even Riverstar, they all depending on him and him alone. Skyfeather was no longer a medicine cat, as he spent more and more time hunting and fighting his skills would dull, but Blackstorm's never would. *This is my Clan and I am their medicine cat. That will never change.*

As Blackstorm was getting sentimental, Riverstar's voice pulled him from his thoughts. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather in the center of camp for a Clan meeting!" As she called the words, he spotted Dewkit, Mistkit and Slatekit sprinting from the

nursery with Silvermoon dashing after them.

"Slow down you three!" They didn't listen to their mothers call and she stopped running, shaking her head with a loving chuckle. *Is it really time already?* Blackstorm sat down outside his den to watch the ceremony, new apprentices would be welcome, he wondered who their mentors would be.

Once Mistkit and the others finally settled down Riverstar could begin the ceremony. "I've gathered the Clan today because it is finally time for our three kits to become apprentices. They have waited six long moons for this day and now they are ready to set their paws on the path to becoming warriors. Though Ashblaze isn't here to see this, I know that he is watching proudly from the stars."

A shadow of sadness crossed Silvermoon's face but she kept her head held high. "Mistkit, Dewkit and Slatekit, from this day forward until you have earned your warrior names you will be known as Mistpaw, Dewpaw and Slatepaw. Mistpaw, I have chosen Skyfeather as your mentor. He's already trained our medicine cat, but I want to test his skills as a warrior's mentor." Skyfeather seemed genuinely shocked that he was chosen to mentor a kit.

"I was not expecting this, Riverstar, but I am honored for the opportunity." Skyfeather stepped forward, touching his muzzle to Mistpaw's. For a moment, Blackstorm felt a twinge of jealousy. He always valued the bond that he and Skyfeather shared, but then he realized that he knew it wouldn't ever change. *Plus, if Mistpaw is anything like me he'll have his work cut out for him.* "Dewpaw, the mentor I've chosen for you is Rabbitspring. Rabbitspring is gentle and kind just as you are, I know that she will train you to be just as strong and compassionate." Blackstorm liked the idea of Rabbitspring as Dewpaw's mentor.

Rabbitspring was a very peaceful warrior, she would make a good mentor for the shy she-cat. "And finally, Slatepaw your mentor will be Leafdawn. As a smart, sharp she-cat I know that she will be able to handle your energy and attitude." Leafdawn and Slatepaw touched muzzles as the other did and the ceremony ended.

"Mistpaw! Dewpaw! Slatepaw!" The Clan cheered and the three

apprentices joined up with their mentors to set out on their new paths. *One day I'll get my own apprentice, I wonder who it will be.* Blackstorm wasn't going to wait for his apprentice, if they were like him then they would find their paws into his den and he would welcome them.

Blackstorm cast a glance at Nightheart who was with Rabbitspring with Sagepaw at her side. The two of them would be able to train together, getting even closer. *I'm so happy for Nightheart.* Blackstorm thought fondly. *She's found true love, and even though I'll never know that, I'm so glad that I get to watch her relish in her love. And honestly, that's all that I need.*

Chapter 7

Falconheart placed his prey atop the fresh-kill pile, stepping back to see if there was something else for him to do. The day was still early, he hoped that he could continue to keep his paws busy. He looked around camp, a thick cloud of sadness hung in the air, it was hard for the cats of SunClan to keep morale high in the days since the death of Heatherflight's kits.

A vigil was held for the tiny kits, named Brightkit and Cedarkit, and Falconheart himself felt deeply saddened by the loss of the kits. The Clan had been waiting two long moons for new kits, and they were taken as soon as they arrived. Falconheart hoped that the two kits were safe and healthy in StarClan.

Heatherflight remaind in the nursery, mourning the loss of her kits. Falconheart hoped that the she-cat would be able to recover in time, but he could understand her needing a lot of time to recover from the loss. According to Honeyfrost, the kitting had taken not only a mental toll on Heatherflight, but a physical one as well. Falconheart had to keep himself busy, it was the best way to move on from such a tragic loss of life.

Falconheart managed to spot Sedgefern sitting outside the warriors den talking with Rosewind, Dovepool and Earthpelt. Falconheart kind of felt awkward approaching the three she-cats but he wanted to see Sedgefern. He slowly padded up to her, his pelt burning with each step.

"Hey, Sedgefern." He greeted, his voice sounding more frigid than he wanted. Sedgefern looked up from her prey with kind eyes.

"Hey there," She purred loudly. Falconheart instantly noticed the other she-cats sharing playful glances. "What's up?"

Why did I come over here again? "I uh--just thought I'd--see if you had been on any patrols today."

"No," Sedgefern replied, smoothing down her fur. "But I'd like to, we could go see if Cinderflame will let us join one."

"Sure." Falconheart's head buzzed at the idea of spending time with Sedgefern. "Come on," She stood up and said farewell to the other she-cats. As they turned away to find the deputy, he saw the other she-cats were giving him judgemental and teasing stares. With his pelt feeling hotter than the sun, he walked at her side to the SunClan deputy.

"Hey you two." Cinderflame greeted. "Looking to get on a patrol?" She questioned eagerly.

Falconheart nodded. "If you would."

"Luckily for you, I'm looking for more cats for the sunhigh patrol. You can join up with Redclaw, Snowtail and Larkthorn. They'll be gathering at the entrance to camp here soon."

"Thank you so much, Cinderflame." Sedgefern purred loudly and the two of them found their patrolmates waiting for them.

"You joining us?" Redclaw questioned as Sedgefern and Falconheart approached them.

"Sure am." Falconheart waved his tail.

"Then let's get going, we're wasting daylight here." Redclaw turned and began leading the patrol out of the camp. They were patrolling the AshClan border, but it was such a beautiful day that they would probably take their time. Falconheart walked close beside Sedgefern, every so often their pelts would brush and he would get a burst of energy.

He recalled their times playing in the forest together, he wished that they could take the time to do that again. *I miss those moments, I want so many more of them with her.* They walked side by side through the forest, Falconheart feeling energized by the warmth of the sun and the scent of Sedgefern beside him. *When I'm with her, I'm so aware of everything she does.* Falconheart thought. *And when I'm not with her, she's all that I can think of.*

"Falconheart!" Falconheart was violently snapped from his thoughts by Redclaw's hiss. He realized that they had reached the AshClan border. "Are you listening? Or would you like to return to running through the clouds?"

"S-sorry." Falconheart's pelt burned. *I'm losing my mind.* "What did you need?"

"Go ahead and mark the border." Redclaw replied, sounding cross. "Catch up with us when you're done."

Sedgefern cast a playful glance at Falconheart before following the patrol into the trees. Falconheart felt embarrassment clawing deep inside of him. *Sedgefern is distracting me. I need to get it together.* He quickly marked the border and ran to catch up with his patrol.

They returned to camp as the sun began to set and Falconheart began to struggle to keep his thoughts in order. *What is wrong with me?* He felt so lost, he cared so deeply for Sedgefern and yet he couldn't tell her that, and he was such a featherbrain when it came to her. *What do I do? How do I get over this?*

As the sun set and Falconheart settled into his nest, he was very aware of Sedgefern at his side. His warmth comforted him, her scent helped him ease into a gentle sleep but it was clear, as he slipped into slumber that his dreams would not be peaceful.

The scent of rotting earth and prey filled his nose and Falconheart opened his eyes, standing in the Dark Forest. His claws dug into the dead grass and damp soil beneath his paws. He had barely come here lately, he knew it was annoying Falconclaw. The few times that he did show up in the shadowy forest, they would have a fight and Falconheart would wake up.

He had never truly forgiven Falconclaw for the training that he had been given, part of him still blamed the dead warrior for Ashblaze's death though he would never mention it to him.

Falconheart heard moment and saw Falconclaw step out of the shadows, his amber eyes glinting with annoyance. "Long time no see, Falconheart." He sneered, his voice dragging low with a growl.

"You're the one who brings me here." Falconheart twitched his tail is annoyance. "So don't get mad at me when I don't show up here."

"You're not as eager to learn as the apprentice I first met." Falconclaw growled. "You're becoming harder to reach."

"Maybe it's because I don't need you anymore." Falconheart rolled his eyes. "Why don't you find another gullible apprentice to train."
"Believe me." Falconclaw's voice was low. "It's tempting, but I'd rather not give up on my current apprentice."
"I haven't been an apprentice for six moons." Falconheart spat.

"And yet today you couldn't keep focused on a simple patrol." Falconclaw's amber eyes burned intently. "It seems that a particular cat has been dragging you down." Falconheart's fur stood on end. "It's bad enough that you're fawning off a kittypet spawn, but even worse that you're letting her distract you. Mates are nothing but a waste of time."

"What would you know." Falconheart growled. "Like any cat would *ever* find you appealing."

Falconclaw chuckled dangerously. "Oh, what do I know? What do *you* know? I had a mate for a while, actually." Falconheart's ears flattened. *Falconclaw? Had a mate?* "It was a short relationship, but mates are nothing but distractions. Same with ktis, they do nothing but pull you down and ruin your life. It was bad enough me putting any time into Thornstar, and look what that turned in to."

"Yeah but I'm nothing like you," Falconheart scoffed. "And Sedgefern isn't a distraction, she's done more for me than you ever have."

"Before that kittypet you were a sharp, skilled and dangerous warrior." Falconheart unsheathed his claws at Falconclaw's insult. "Now you are softer than a hare," Falconclaw began to turn away. "Hold on to this moment, Falconheart, because soon I'll claw that smug look off your face and I'll relish in watching you lose it all."

Something about Falconclaw's words chilled Falconheart to the bone. *Is he threatening me? Or Segdefern.* Falconheart let out a low

growl as Falconclaw vanished into the darkness. *If he touches her, I'll make sure that starving in this starless forest is the least of his concerns.*

Chapter 8

Where am I? Honeyfrost questioned she was in a completely new place, it wasn't SunClan territory new or old. The stars shimmered brightly overhead, the scent of the forest filled her nose but it was so unfamiliar. She began slowly wandering through the strange forest, trying to figure out where she was and *why* she was there.

She was surrounded by oak trees, which was very similar to her own home but nothing was familiar. Then, a chilling noise made Honeyfrost's paws freeze to the ground. She looked up at the towering oak tree ahead of her. On the highest branch something shimmered in the moonlight.

A pure white owl rested on the branch, its pitch black eyes focused intently on Honeyfrost. For a moment she felt nervous, but the sight of the owl relaxed her. It let out another eerie call, fluffing its glowing feathers. *This has to be the owl that guided us to the mountains.* She thought. *Why is it here again?*

"What do you have to show me?" Honeyfrost called to the owl. "Do I need to be scared?"

The owl let out another low hoot and raised from the branch, flapping its glowing wings towards the moon. A single feather fluttered down to the ground, Honeyfrost approached the feather and gave it a sniff. It smelled like SunClan. *What does this mean?* Honeyfrost wondered, looking in the direction of where the owl had flown. *Is this a sign?*

As the thought crossed her mind, Honeyfrost woke up. She was back in the medicine cat den, but the call of the owl still rang deep inside her mind. *I've never had a dream like that before?* She looked to Pebblestep who was still sleeping. *Should I tell her about it?* Honeyfrost wasn't sure if she should, but if it was that same owl surely she should?

It was just past dawn but Honeyfrost figured she should probably

get her paws busy before Pebblestep woke up. She took note of what their herb supply was. *We could use more cobwebs.* She noted and then set out into the camp, breathing in the sweet morning air. She did her usual rounds of camp, checking in on the elders and the nursery.

Fawnheart recovered well from her kitting and Heatherflight was getting physically better. She was still torn over the loss of her kits, but Honeyfrost was doing everything she could to help the queen recover.

As Honeyfrost finished up in the nursery she spotted Dawnstar approaching her with soft green eyes. "Good morning, Honeyfrost." She purred. "Always an early riser, just like me."

Honeyfrost purred happily in return. "Yeah, it's best to start earlier." She looked away. "And I had this dream last night. I'm not sure how to feel about it."

"Tell me about it." Dawnstar expressed concern. Being both her mother and her leader, Honeyfrost knew that she could confide in her dreams to Dawnstar.

"Well," Honeyfrost began and explained to her mother about the owl, the strange forest and the feather.

"Sounds about as confusing as most StarClan dreams." Dawnstar began once Honeyfrost explained. "The owl was a sign of guidance for the four Clans when it first appeared, it could very well be that again. Though you may not be able to figure it out now or even any time soon but when the time is right, your dream will make sense." For a moment, Honeyfrost thought about what Honeywing told her before Echoheart's attack.

The choices of the brave, and the mistakes of the frightened will shape the forest with unsteady paws and claws that rain blood. She had gone over those words over and over again and they still made no sense to her, she honestly felt like they never would. She hadn't talked to anyone about that prophecy, she just didn't know how. *Falconheart is a part of it too, he should know.* Honeyfrost just didn't quite know what to do.

"If you have any more pressing dreams, you can come talk to me about them." Dawnstar rested her muzzle on Honeyfrost's head. "I'll always be here for you, as both your mother and your leader."

"Thank you." Honeyfrost purred happily. Dawnstar got busy with Clan duties while Honeyfrost returned to the medicine cat den. She thought idly about her dream while Pebblestep and her worked slowly.

As Honeyfrost began sorting out the dried out herbs from the good ones, a blood chilling cry split the air as a she-cat screamed in pain. Honeyfrost dropped her herbs as did Pebblestep and they sprinted out into camp to investigate the noise.

In the center of camp Briarrose was lying on the ground, breathing heavily and eyes wide with pain and fear. The Clan watched in fear as Honeyfrost and Pebblestep rushed to her side. "Briarrose what's wrong?"

"I-I don't know." Briarrose squeaked out, her entire body shaking. "It just--it felt like my stomach just split open."

Honeyfrost stared in shock at the she-cat. *What would cause that?* Then something strange caught her eyes, there was a very small ripple in Briarrose's belly. *It can't be.* "Pebblestep." She spoke her mentors name, her voice trembling. Pebblestep looked at Honeyfrost for a moment, then followed her gaze to Briarrose's belly.

"Oh StarClan..." Pebblestep breathed out. "Honeyfrost, run to our den and get herbs *now.*"

"Wait--what's happening?" Briarrose demanded, her voice panicked.

"You're giving birth."

"*What?*" Honeyfrost couldn't stay and listen and broke into a sprint to their den and gathered the herbs as fast as she could, she then returned to her mentor and Briarrose.

"How is she giving birth?" Yarrowtail demanded, sounding horrified. *He must be the father.* "We didn't even know she was

expecting kits."

"These kits are *very* early." Pebblestep explained. "Briarrose, I'm going to need you to remain as calm as possible." She looked up to Cherryleaf who had left her kits with Fawnheart to come and check on her sister.

"I'm going to need a lot of help here." Pebblestep explained. "But I need you all to stay back."

"Shouldn't we move to the nursery? Or the medicine cat den?" Briarrose asked, her voice pained.

"No time, these kits are coming *now*." Pebblestep positioned herself behind Briarrose while Honeyfrost readied herbs and pushed Briarrose a stick, she knew instantly what it was for and took the stick in her jaws.

Yarrowtail began rasping his tongue over Briarrose's ears but Honeyfrost could see how terrified he was. *I'm scared too. I never thought I would be dealing with a situation like this, but medicine cats have to know how to handle tough situations.*

"Cherryleaf I need you over here," Pebblestep called for the queen who quickly padded to the medicine cat's side. "The first kit is almost here, I need you to be ready to care for it, okay?"

"Got it." Cherryleaf mewed boldy. "Don't worry, Briarrose, everything will be okay."

Honeyfrost moved down to help Pebblestep and saw the kit starting to appear. Unlike Heatherflight's kits, this kit was coming out the correct way, even if it was incredibly tiny.

Briarrose let out a bone-chilling wail of pain and the stick began to splinter. "Make it stop!" She wailed.

"Hang in there, Briarrose." Honeyfrost called to her. "You're doing great." With another yowl, the first kit arrived. It was the tiniest little thing that Honeyfrost had ever seen. Cherryleaf picked up the bundle of tabby fur and nipped through the sac, quickly following up with rapid licking. Honeyfrost watched intensely, hoping that

she wouldn't have to witness another dead kit.

She was finally able to breathe when the kit let out a sharp cry. Cherryleaf continued licking and Honeyfrost moved her attention back to Briarrose. "Cloudspots!" She called. "You've got the next one."

More pained cries a second kit, this one pure black, came and just as quickly as the first one began mewling for its mother. Briarrose was in a lot of pain, but the kits were coming shockingly smoothly. Another kit came, but she still wasn't done. *Four kits, such a large litter.*

While Cinderflame took the third kit, Flamepetal came in for the fourth one. "Am I done now." Briarrose panted. "I can't--" A powerful spasm gripped Briarrose's body and she let out a sharp wail of pain, her jaws snapping the stick between her teeth.

"Not done yet." Pebblestep breathed out, Honeyfrost could feel the exhaustion weighing on their shoulders. *Five kits born so early.* She thought. "Honeyfrost, you get this one."

Honeyfrost nodded and readied herself as the final kit came into the world. Suddenly, they were back in the same situation as Heatherflight. Brairrose was losing blood at an alarming rate, and the kits were so weak and small. *I won't lose these kits. Not again.* Honeyfrost knew that Pebblestep would take care of Briarrose, but now this little kit's life rested in her paws.

The kit that came out was white, Honeyfrost took the kit into her paws and began rapidly licking its back. She thought the first kit born was the smallest kit she had ever seen, but nothing compared to this one. She was barely the size of a mouse. *I won't fail her.*

The kit didn't move for a long time, but Honeyfrost didn't stop. *Come on little kit, move!* As the thought crossed her mind, the kits body twitched. She didn't yowl or meow, but she let out a tiny little squeak, a perfect little sign of life. *Thank StarClan.*

"We have to get them to the medicine cat den." Pebblestep announced, her paws once again caked in blood but Briarrose was

still alive. She was exhausted, clearly in pain. With the help of the other four cats and Yarrowtail who had helped deliver, Briarrose and the five kits were guided to the medicine cat den and placed into a nest.

Instantly the five kits began slowly wriggling their way to Briarrose's belly, starving for milk. "These kits are weak and vulnerable." Pebblestep announced, turning to her Clanmates. "I"m glad for your help, but from now on the only cats allowed in here with them are me and Honeyfrost."

"But those are my kits." Yarrowtail argued.

"I understand that," Pebblestep's tone was gentle with her brother. "But they are very weak, anything can get them sick and that sickness can easily kill them. Let us work, please."

Yarrowtail hesitated but then sighed. "Alright, Pebblestep." His eyes grew sad. "I know they're in great paws, with both of you." Yarrowtail and the others turned and Pebblestep looked down at the five bundles of fur.

"This isn't going to be easy," Pebblestep mewed. "But these kits are counting on us, this very well may be the hardest thing we ever have to do."

Chapter 9

"How are they?" Pebblestep called from across the den. "Any changes? Bad or good?" Honeyfrost gave the kits a gentle sniff. They smelled of milk, nothing seemed off. They were so tiny and not very active, though they wouldn't be given how early they were born. Honeyfrost let out a heavy yawn and turned away from the kits.

"Nothing seems to be wrong, they're not eating a lot though." Honeyfrost explained.

"They probably won't right away. From my guess they were born about a moon early, so they'll pretty much sleep for an entire moon just to catch up." Pebblestep explained, her voice strained.

Honeyfrost and Pebblestep had each only slept through about half the night when they physically could not stay awake any longer. The kits had survived the night, but Pebblestep didn't seem so sure that it would last. *She told me how easily it is for new kits to get sick.*

As Briarrose woke up, Pebblestep checked on her as well. The queen had suffered a lot from the hard kitting, from blood loss and the overall pain she endured. She would be recovering for a very long time. "You know," Brairrose mewed, looking at her kits. "I think I finally have names for all of them."

"Yeah?" Pebblestep purred. "I think it would help us for them to have names, instead of just saying 'the black one'."

Briarrose looked lovingly at her kits. "The black one is Rushkit, both because of long his tail is, like a rush, and because of how quickly he got here." She purred in amusement. "The brown tabby is Oakkit, the ginger tom is Firekit, the tortoiseshell she-cat is Blossomkit, because her spots look like fallen petals and finally, the little white she-cat is Owlkit, after the owl that guided us here."

Owlkit. For a moment, Honeyfrost's dream appeared in her mind. The chilling white owl. *Was StarClan telling me about her?* "They're

wonderful names." Pebblestep purred.

Honeyfrost could see how much Briarrose loved her kits, even if they were unexpected, they were very well loved. "I should go update our Clanmates." Honeyfrost mewed, she knew that all of her Clanmates would be wanting to know about the kits. *And I should tell Yarrowtail their names.*

"Good idea." Pebblestep replied.

Honeyfrost stepped out into camp, she felt exhausted but she noticed Yarrowtail running up to her. "Honeyfrost! How is Briarrose? How are the kits? Are they okay?"

"For now, they're doing great." Honeyfrost replied. "Briarrose is recovering well, and she chose names for the kits."
"What are they?" Yarrowtail asked eagerly. "I wanna know."

"Rushkit, Oakkit, Firekit, Blossomkit and Owlkit."

"Those are perfect names." Yarrowtail's eyes flooded with love. "I can't wait to see them, and her."

"Pebblestep believes that as long as they live through this moon, they'll be just fine." She explained. "But I'll update you every day."

Honeyfrost went through her camp and updated all of the worrying cats about the kits, they were all warmed by the news but Honeyfrost felt fear nagging at her chest. This was only one day, these kits had a very long path ahead of them. One that would not be easy, not for the kits or for their medicine cats. *No matter what it takes.* Honeyfrost vowed. *I'll do everything I can for these kits.*

As the days passed, Honeyfrost and Pebblestep continued caring for the five kits every waking moment. Sleep evaded them both as they both feared the worse. The kits still didn't do much other than eat small amounts and sleep. Even Briarrose was barely eating which made producing milk difficult. They gave Briarrose plenty of borage and burnet for strength but something *still* felt wrong.

While Briarrose and the kits slept, Honeyfrost took a moment to breathe. She felt like she had run around the entire forest, but she

had spent all day in the medicine cat den. "I need some fresh-air." Pebblestep spoke up. "I'm gonna go grab us some prey to share."

Honeyfrost nodded, she knew that neither of them had much of an appetite so sharing prey would be the best. Honeyfrost curled up in her nest for a moment and without realizing it slipped into a deep slumber.

Overhead, an owl let out a shrill cry as it soared across the sky overhead. "Wait!" Honeyfrost called, breaking into a run after it. "What are you trying to show me? Is this about Owlkit? Please talk to me!"

The owl vanished and Honeyfrost was left alone. *I can't do this.* She thought, her paws shaking. "How am I supposed to interpret visions from StarClan if you don't explain them?" Honeyfrost asked the stars. "You don't exactly make this easy! What does this owl mean? Are these kits going to survive?"
"So many questions." A soft voice spoke, Honeyfrost wasn't actually expecting a response so she jumped back in alarm, spinning to face the voice. She saw a pale, silver tabby tom. His fur reflected the moonlight and the stars shimmered in his eyes. "You are so desperate to be given answers that you don't search for them yourself."

"Who are you?" Honeyfrost questioned, he smelled of SunClan and herbs.

"My name is Feathernose, the medicine cat before Honeywing." He explained.

Honeyfrost felt her body relax. "I've heard about you."

"I would imagine so." Feathernose purred. "But, Honeyfrost, I meant what I said. You can't expect every answer to jump into your paws. A lot of times not even StarClan has all the answers."

"Then what am I supposed to do?" Honeyfrost questioned. "How do I know what I'm supposed to do when not even StarClan knows."

"You will figure it out." Honeyfrost dropped her shoulders,

Feathernose chuckled. "Not the most encouraging answer, I know, but you'll get there Honeyfrost. As time passes, everything becomes more and more clear. You have been guided by StarClan since the day of your birth, you will find your answers in time."

"I hope so." Honeyfrost sighed, she looked to Feathernose. She had heard a lot of things about him, he had always managed to keep so calm. "How did you manage to stay so calm during stressful situations? It's what everyone always praises you for."

"I didn't always." Feathernose replied. "When I was younger, I was faced with a horrible wound and I froze up. I thought I wasn't cut out to be a medicine cat, but my mentor, Moonbreeze helped me. She taught me that everything happens for a reason, even if it seems unjust or unfair, it's what helped me through the hardest of times. I know it seems silly, but that's what kept me going."

Honeyfrost thought about what he was saying. *Everything happens for a reason?* "What about--"

"I know what you're going to say," Feathernose interrupted her. "What about Heatherflight's kits? What about Pikepaw and Sorrelpaw? What about Applespots?" He looked intently into Honeyfrost's eyes. "The reason may not always be clear, and you may not believe it yourself but honestly, it's what I needed to do to get me through the hard times. Us medicine cats see horrors that our warrior Clanmates could never understand. They fight battles and hunt prey, but you had a little kit die in your paws. Its hard to get through that kind of trauma and if it wasn't for that mindset--" Feathernose turned away, his eyes burning. "I don't think I could've survived being a medicine cat."

Honeyfrost thought long and hard about Feathernose's words. *He's right. What we do is hard, we all have our ways of getting through it.* "It's time for us to part ways, Honeyfrost." Feathernose looked back at her. "You will be needed here soon."

"What?"

Honeyfrost! A voice rang within Honeyfrost's ears. *Honeyfrost!* In an instant, Honeyfrost opened her eyes and was back in the medicine

cat den. She met Pebblestep's gaze, it was filled with fear. *I forgot I fell asleep.* "What's wrong?" What Pebblestep said next chilled her to the bone.

"The kits are sick."

Chapter 10

"They're sick? How? With what?" Honeyfrost demanded, padding over to the nest and giving the kits a sniff. They smelled foul of infection. *Oh StarClan no.*

"Rushkit vomited," Pebblestep mewed, her voice shaky. "The others reek of sickness, it's a common illness among premature kits." She explained, taking a deep breath. "I've never dealt with it, but Feathernose did once. The kits will start vomiting and they will become dehydrated, they won't want to eat but we have to make sure they do. We *have* to keep them hydrated or they will die."

Pebblestep could clearly sense how nervous Honeyfrost was. "The best thing we can do right now is our jobs, Honeyfrost. These kits need us and we have to give them everything we can. Just focus on healing this kits."

Honeyfrost nodded and together, she and Pebblestep began coming up with plans. They started giving Briarrose even more borage and made sure the kits were eating every few moments. Though each time the kits would eat, they would instantly throw the milk back up. They worked all day and night, both Honeyfrost and Pebblestep going without sleep or eating.

Honeyfrost gave each kit a gentle sniff, from what she figured the worst off kits were Rushkit, Firekit and Owlkit. Owlkit scared her, the she-cat was barely the size of a mouse. *I'll do everything I can to keep you alive, Owlkit.* The owl's cry rang in her mind once more. *No matter what it takes.*

Honeyfrost and Pebblestep worked through the night without rest, Honeyfrost felt as if her paws were stuck to the ground and her eyelids were heavy. Vision was starting to blur but she refused to slow down even for a moment. Pebblestep was even worse off, she hadn't slept since the night before Honeyfrost's dream.

Pebblestep's movements were sluggish, but determination burned

deeply in her blue eyes. She looked over each kit carefully every passing moment. Honeyfrost felt the long night weighing deep in her chest. "How are they--" Honeyfrost heard Dawnstar's voice at the entrance.

"Get back!" Pebblestep snapped, her blue eyes filled with panic and stress. Dawnstar stepped back as Pebblestep relaxed slightly. "Sorry, Dawnstar." She sighed. "But you really need to get back."
"I just wanted to ask you if they were doing alright." Honeyfrost approached her mother and got her away from the den.

"They're not any better." Honeyfrost explained, her voice strained. "We're working as hard as we can."

"Honeyfrost, both of you look so exhausted." Dawnstar mewed with concern in her voice. "You need to rest."

"If we rest for even a moment we could lose a kit." Honeyfrost replied. "These kits need us."

Dawnstar sighed. "Please, just." Dawnstar rested her muzzle on Honeyfrost's head. "Take care of yourself and Pebblestep."

Honeyfrost turned away from her mother, dragging her paws back in the medicine cat den. Pebblestep was hunched over the kits looking over them once more. "Pebblestep," Honeyfrost spoke up. *Dawnstar's right. We need rest.* "You need some rest, we both do."

Pebblestep stepped back away from the kits. "I can't." She admitted. "Even if I tried to lay down I wouldn't be able to sleep."

"We can't work ourselves half to death." Honeyfrost argued.

"You rest." Pebblestep instructed, Honeyfrost could see the pure exhaustion in her eyes. "I'll let you sleep for a bit then I'll wake you, if the kits are still the same way or improved, then I'll get a little bit of sleep."

"Pebblestep--"

"Just get some sleep, Honeyfrost." Pebblestep snapped. "I'll wake you if anything happens."

Honeyfrost was uncertain but she could hear her nest calling her. Honeyfrost curled up in her nest, looking across the den at Briarrose who slept peacefully cuddled up with her kits. The queen hadn't gotten much sleep either, but was finally able to rest with her kits. Without even trying, Honeyfrost closed her eyes and fell into a dreamless sleep.

Honeyfrost woke to the sun shining across her face. *It's sunhigh.* She realized and sat up, looking around. She felt more energized, but then she saw Pebblestep. The medicine cat's face was dark and twisted with pain. Honeyfrost quickly rose to her paws. "Pebblestep?" Honeyfrost spoke, her mentor didn't stir. "What's wrong? Did something happen?"

Pebblestep weekly lifted her head. "Firekit is dead."

Honeyfrost's heart shattered inside of her chest. *No.* "Wh-you told me you wake me up if something--"

"It just happened." Pebblestep turned away, her body trembling. "Briarrose doesn't even know yet." The queen still slept soundly. Honeyfrost looked at Firekit, the tiny ginger tabby looked like he was sleeping but he was completely motionless. Pebblestep looked up, the emotion in her eyes broke Honeyfrost even more. *She's breaking down.*

"These are my nieces and nephews." Pebblestep's voice trembled. "What kind of medicine cat am I if I can't keep them alive? I did *everything* I possibly could, and Firekit...he didn't even stand a chance." Pebblestep looked to the kits again. "Owlkit is next if I don't do *something*, she's barely moving at all. It's taking all of her strength just to breathe."

"Pebblestep we--"

From the next, Briarrose stirred and opened her amber eyes. "Wha-did something happen?"

"I'm so sorry." Pebblestep couldn't face her patient. "Firekit died."

"What?" Briarrose's eyes went wide, filling with pain for her dead

son. "N-no, I barely got to know him." She buried her muzzle into Firekit's tiny body. "Why is this happening to me? Great StarClan what did I do to deserve this?"

Brairrose is blaming herself while Pebblestep is blaming herself. Honeyfrost realized, both she-cats were crumbling around them. "This isn't either of your faults." Honeyfrost raised her voice. "This is a terrible situation," She continued. "But right now there's four kits who desperately need their medicine cats *and* their mother. " Honeyfrost stepped closer to Pebblestep. "When Bramblepelt died you told me not blame myself, you said the same thing when Heatherflight's kits died. We do our jobs, Pebblestep and sometimes what we have isn't enough. StarClan gave us these kits for a *reason* and I'm not about to let them down!"

Something changed deep in Pebblestep's gaze, she opened her mouth to speak but Briarrose interrupted her. "Oh StarClan, no!" Briarrose wailed. "Owlkit isn't breathing!"

Oh come on. Honeyfrost felt her energy draining. *This can't be happening.* Pebblestep was on her paws in an instant, moving quickly to the nest and looking at Owlkit. The way she moved no cat would be able to tell that she hadn't slept in so long. "StarClan no." Pebblestep breathed out and scooped the tiny she-cat into her paw.

"Pebblestep what are you--"

"I'm not letting StarClan take another kit from me!" Pebblestep declared and laid Owlkit out on her back, her chest was still. Honeyfrost could do nothing but watch as Pebblestep began gently pushing down on her frail chest. She did this several times before leaning down and lowering her muzzle so it was just barely above Owlkit's. She breathed out slowly into the kits mouth and repeated pushing on her chest.

Honeyfrost and Briarrose stared in a stunned silence as Pebblestep worked. Owlkit was motionless for so long, Honeyfrost was starting to give up hope. Just as Honeyfrost was about to turn away, Owlkit let out the strongest little wail she had ever heard.

Honeyfrost let out a sharp gasp, along with Briarrose. "She's alive." Honeyfrost breathed out. "She's alive."

Pebblestep's entire body relaxed as she placed Owlkit back beside Briarrose. The queen lifted her head, her eyes overflowing with emotion. "Thank you so much, Pebblestep. Thank you so so much."

Pebblestep just nodded and stumbled backwards while Owlkit latched on to eat. Honeyfrost let her mentor lean against her. "Thank you, Honeyfrost." She whispered. "I wouldn't have been able to do that without your motivation."

"You did the same for me." Honeyfrost breathed out and led Pebblestep to a nest. 'You need sleep, Pebblestep. I'll watch over the kits, I promise." Pebblestep didn't argue, she clearly couldn't go much longer without rest. The moment she fell into her nest, the medicine cat fell asleep.

Honeyfrost was left shaken after almost losing another kit. *Pebblestep is so amazing.* She thought. *I am so lucky to have her as my mentor, and these kits are lucky to have her as well. All of SunClan is.*

Chapter 11

"Are you sure you don't want to come?" Honeyfrost questioned. "I've never gone by myself before."

"Yes, I'm sure." Pebblestep replied, looking over Owlkit once more. "I'd feel much happier if I stayed here with the kits, but you'll do just fine on your own."

"Alright," Honeyfrost sighed and turned out of the medicine cat den. A few days had passed since Pebblestep saved Owlkit's life and the kits were still sick, but they were getting better and stronger with each day. Oakkit and Blossomkit didn't even show symptoms anymore. *Did we do it? Did we save them?*

Honeyfrost glanced up at the sky, the half-moon starting to appear. She would be going to the Spirit Garden alone and she wasn't quite sure how to feel, but she had to have faith that she would do alright. *I wonder if I'll see Feathernose again.* She thought, she had taken his words to heart and they had really helped her cope with the death of Firekit.

As Honeyfrost ventured out of camp she reached the river where Blackstorm and Oneflight were already talking. "Oh," Oneflight mewed upon spotting Honeyfrost. "Welcome, Honeyfrost. Where's Pebblestep? Nothing bad happened, I hope."

"Briarrose unexpectedly gave birth," Honeyfrost explained. "The kits were born super early and got sick. We lost one, but the other four seem to be recovering."

"Sorry about the one that passed, but at least the other four are doing well. Five kits is certainly a pawful." Oneflight dipped his head.

"I hope the rest of them get better." Blackstorm's words warmed Honeyfrost's heart. "You were right about Primroseheart by the way, she just moved into the nursery." The thought of even more

kits being born made Honeyfrost feel a twinge of hope.

"That's so good to hear."

"Well I'm sure Roseheart will be waiting for us, we should get going." Oneflight urged and the three medicine cats began on their path to Spirit Garden. It was a peaceful walk as the three medicine cats enjoyed the sweet greenleaf night. They met up with Roseheart and began the trek up the mountain.

When they finally reached the cavern, Honeyfrost curled up front of the star-shaped flower and breathed in the sweet scent of the Spirit Garden, letting sleep take her. Honeyfrost woke up in the cavern, but she knew she was dreaming.

Honeyfrost climbed out of the tunnel and into the open air. On the ledge that overlooked the territories sat Honeywing, her golden pelt shimmering with the stars. "What a beautiful night." She breathed out.

Honeyfrost padded up to her and sat down, resting her tail across her paws. "It is."

"You and Pebblestep have done some great work, Honeyfrost." Honeywing breathed out. "And I heard that Feathernose paid you a visit."

Honeyfrost nodded. "His advice really helped."

"It always does, he's a very wise cat." Honeywing purred.

A question had been burning deep within Honeyfrost's mind. "How is Firekit? Is he okay? I wish we--"

Honeywing raised her tail to silence Honeyfrost. "Firekit is safe and happy in the paws of Applespots and Dovetail. As for the other four, they will get out of this just fine. Their sickness will fade and they will grow into full warriors."

Honeyfrost sighed heavily with relief. "Well that's a relief."

"There's another thing you need to know about those kits,"

Honeywing continued. "Those four kits have incredibly powerful destinies ahead of them. Those four kits will completely change the Clans as we know it, all of them."

Honeyfrost stared in shock. "What? What do I need to do? Do I--"

"There's nothing you need to do, Honeyfrost." Honeywing assured her. "You can guide them, but they will find their paws on their destinies as they grow. Just as your mother did, and just as you and your brother have. It won't be today or tomorrow, or even in the next few moons but those kits have very powerful destinies."

"Wow." Honeyfrost breathed out.

"Feel free to tell Briarrose about Firekit as well, you can also tell Heatherflight that Brightkit and Cedarkit are safe and happy as well."

"I think they'll be happy to hear that." Honeyfrost gazed out across the territories. "What about the prophecy?"

"What about it? It still hasn't come to light, but it will soon, and I know that you will have the strength to face it when the time comes."

"How can you be so sure?" Honeyfrost met Honeywing's gaze.

"Because you are strong, Honeyfrost. You are strong and you are brave, your paws will shape this forest, they will shape a path for those kits to follow." Honeywing rested her tail on Honeyfrost's shoulders. "Never forget that."

Honeyfrost reached camp as the sun began to rise, before she reached the medicine cat den she was cut off by Yarrowtail, the tom's eyes were filled with fear. "Honeyfrost, I know you probably need sleep but I just need to know how my kits are doing."

For once, Honeyfrost could be confident in what she was saying. "Yarrowtail they're going to be just fine." Relief flooded his pale green gaze. "These four kits of your are fighters, they may be weak now but when they grow up with will be some of the strongest kits the Clans have ever seen."

Yarrowtail bowed his head. "Oh thank you so much, Honeyfrost." He pressed up against her. "You have grown into such a wonderful she-cat, just like your mother."

"Thank you, Yarrowtail." Honeyfrost bowed her head and let the father relished in the good news. She stepped into the medicine cat den where Pebblestep was resting her nest, but not sleeping, her eyes resting intently on the kits.

"Welcome back." Pebblestep mewed from her nest. "How was the Spirit Garden."

"It was great." Honeyfrost purred, sitting down happily. "Honeywing promised me that these kits are going to be okay, they'll get over this sickness."

For the first time in days, Pebblestep purred. "That's such a relief."

"She also told me that they're going to change the Clans." Honeyfrost added, she could feel Pebblestep looking at her, but Honeyfrost kept her eyes focused on one kit in particular, Owlkit. *I feel like she above all else is going to change this Clan.*

"Then I suppose we better keep them healthy, shouldn't we?"

Honeyfrost purred loudly, she felt hope for the first time since these kits were born. *I can't wait to see what they become.*

Chapter 12

The past quarter moon had been quite hectic for SunClan. The birth of Briarrose's kits had shocked the entire Clan, and the death of one of them had been tragic. However, thanks to the excellent skills of Honeyfrost and Pebblestep, the remaining four overcame their sickness with the exception of Owlkit who according to Honeyfrost still had a tiny cough, but the medicine cats assured the Clan all four kits would grow up just fine.

Though the kits were unexpected, they had quickly been adored by the entirety of the Clan. Their visitors were still restricted, with only Yarrowtail allowed to visit them but he boasted about his kits to every cat that would listen. Falconheart had been amazed to hear the story of how Pebblestep brought Owlkit back from death, Honeyfrost had told him in great detail and he couldn't believe his ears.

Medicine cats truly are incredible. Falconheart thought, hating himself for once thinking they were useless. The whole kit situation had got him thinking about his future, ever since his dream with Falconclaw he felt scared, he felt something creeping in the back of his mind. Falconclaw wasn't happy that Falconheart had feelings for Sedgefern. *But we aren't mates.* He reminded. *Not yet.*

Falconheart *wanted* to call Sedgefern his mate, when he looked at her he wanted to spend every single moment with her. He wanted to hear her voice every day, he wanted to share prey with her, share a nest with her and one day he wanted to have kits with her. *I can't do that until I've dealt with Falconclaw.* He had painfully realized. *And I will, I don't want to ever go back into that disgusting forest. Once Falconclaw is dealt with...then I will be able to be with Sedgefern.*

"Falconheart!" A voice calling his name got Falconheart to push away his thoughts of the future, he saw Flashtail approaching him. "Can you find Sedgefern, Cinderflame told me that Dawnstar wants to talk to us."

My mother wants to see me? Falconheart tilted his head. *Why would she tell me through Flashtail and not just talk to me?* Falconheart managed to find Sedgefern pretty quickly and the two started walking to the leader's den.

"What's this about?" Sedgefern questioned.

"No clue." Falconheart replied. "I don't know why she would want to talk to three of us in particular."

Sedgefern thought for a moment, then out a gasp of realization. "Wait! She could be asking us to be mentors to Cherryleaf's kits!"

Falconheart stared. "Really? You think that could be it? I didn't think I'd get to mentor them since we're technically kin."

"Well let's go find out!" Segdefern headbutted him forward and they met up with Flashtail just outside the leader's den. They all stepped inside where Dawnstar was waiting.

"Welcome you three." Dawnstar purred. "Have a seat." The three cats sat down eagerly awaiting what Dawnstar would say. "You may have already figured it out, but I gathered the three of you here to say that I would like the three of you to become mentors to Cherryleaf's kits."

"Really?" Flashtail seemed shocked. "You want me to mentor one of them?"

Dawnstar nodded. "I understand if you don't feel up for it so soon after the loss of your kits, but I figured it would help you keep your paws busy."

"I would love to, Dawnstar." Flashtail bowed his head. "Thank you for trusting me to do so." Since Flashtail joined the Clan, this would be his first apprentice. It had seemed like so long ago that Flashtail joined the Clan, most days Falconheart forgot that he was a rogue in the first place.

"You will be mentoring Snowkit, Sedgefern will mentor Windkit and Falconheart you will mentor Bluekit." Dawnstar explained.

"Thank you so much." Falconheart bowed his head, Bluekit had been exactly the kit he wanted to mentor. "I'll do the best I can to train her."

"I should hope so." Dawnstar purred. "Now let's get this ceremony underway!"

Dawnstar gathered the Clan and Falconheart, Sedgefern and Flashtail sat off to the side feeling just as excited as the three kits in the center of camp, their paws restless. "Today is the day that three kits turn six moons old, meaning they are ready to become SunClan apprentices." The kits could barely sit still. "Windkit, Bluekit and Snowkit. From this day forward until you have earned your warrior names you will be known as Windpaw, Bluepaw and Snowpaw. Windpaw, your mentor will be Sedgefern. Sedgefern is strong, fierce and loyal and I know she will guide you well."

Falconheart watched as Sedgefern touched her muzzle to Windpaw's, the two so eager to start. *She's going to do great.* Falconheart thought, then focused back on the ceremony. *My turn.* "Bluepaw, I have chosen Falconheart as your mentor. Your mother mentored him, so I know you will benefit from the skills he has to teach you."

Falconheart faced Bluepaw, her eyes wide and filled with excitement and joy. He touched his muzzle to hers and they started a new bond as mentor and apprentice. They stepped to the side with only Snowpaw remaining. "And finally, Snowpaw your mentor will be Flashtail. Once a rogue turned warrior, Flashtail knows what loyalty means I trust him to teach you all he knows."

"Windpaw! Bluepaw! Snowpaw!" The Clan cheered their new apprentices and the ceremony was over.

"I'm so excited!" Bluepaw ran in circles around Falconheart, just about making his head spin. "What are we gonna do first? Fighting? Hunting? Exploring?"

"Slow down there little one," Falconheart put his paw on Bluepaw's back, slowing her down.

"Hey!" She whipped around to face him, her green eyes burning. "I'm not little! I'm a full apprentice now!" Falconheart admired the fire inside of her, it reminded him a lot of when he was an apprentice.

"Alright, apprentice." Falconheart held his head high. "Why don't we get out in the forest and do some hunting. After all, running around doesn't feed the Clan."

"Yeah!" Bluepaw was full of energy and persistence. *She's so eager to learn. Just what I was hoping.*

"We'll go ahead and join you." Sedgefern waved her tail with Windpaw at her side. WIndpaw didn't seem nearly as boastful as Bluepaw, but Falconheart could see the energy about to explode from her blue gaze.

"We'll join as well," Flashtail mewed, approaching with Snowpaw. "If that's alright."

"Of course." Falconheart nodded. "Training with siblings is always fun, I never had the chance to really train with my sister." As they turned out of camp, Bluepaw trotted up to Falconheart.

"Why didn't you train with your sister?" She asked.

"Because my sister is Honeyfrost and she's a medicine cat." He explained. "We took two very different paths, and we weren't able to train together. However, I was the one who taught her how to fight, so that made up for it. Plus, she's a very good medicine cat."

"She is! She's the best!" Bluepaw purred loudly. "I wanna meet the new kits, but she won't let us."

"That's because the kits are very weak." Sedgefern chimed in. "They just got over being sick, and they might get sick again."

"When will they get better?" Snowpaw inquired curiously.

"Pebblestep says when they're about a moon old, once they are able to find their strength they should be fine."

"I can't wait!"

They finally reached the training hollow and the three apprentices lined up. "So," Flashtail began, facing the three sisters. "When you're hunting, there's a lot you need to understand and its different for each kind of prey."

"What does that mean?" Bluepaw tilted her head. "How could it be different for different kinds of prey."
"Well," Flashtail continued. "Mice can feel vibrations in the ground. Step too hard and they'll be gone before you can even get your claws on them. Squirrels can quickly run up into trunks. Birds will fly up into the sky so you have to catch them by the wings and drag them down. There's a lot you'll need to learn."

"Where do we start?" Windpaw questioned.

"The hunter's crouch." Falconheart answered. "It's the key part of hunting, a good or bad hunting crouch can completely change the outcome of your catch. Show me what you've got."

Each of the three apprentices crouched down, and none of them quite nailed it. Snowpaw basically flattened herself on the ground, Bluepaw's hind legs were spread too far apart and Windpaw was unbalanced. "When you crouch," Falconheart went on. "You need to find the perfect position."

He crouched down to show them. "You need to have your hindlegs strong and stable, they need to be able to power your pounce. Your front paws need to be precise, able to catch and kill your prey. You need to be low to the ground, but not so low that you can't move."

"What do I do with my tail?" Bluepaw questioned, trying to mimic Falconheart. "It feels so awkward."

"Keep your tail sticking out to balance you," It was Sedgefern who answered, doing her own hunter's crouch beside Falconheart. "Keep it low, but don't let it brush the leaves."

Falconheart looked at Sedgefern, her crouch was so perfect. It showed off her muscles and soft gray pelt. *Focus, mousebrain!*

Falconheart pulled his eyes off Sedgefern to focus on the apprentices.

The three apprentices each attempted the hunting crouch again, no prey was caught but they all made great progress, it wouldn't be long before they were all catching their own prey. *This is going to be such an amazing experience.* Falconheart thought, he was excited to see Bluepaw grow into a strong, brave warrior. *And the best part is.* He glanced at Sedgefern who was helping Windpaw with her crouch. *I get to spend even more time with her.*

Chapter 13

"I don't know..." Nightheart looked down intently at Sagepaw and Hailpaw. The two apprentices stood still, holding their heads high but she could see the pressure in their eyes. They were waiting for her response, for her direction. Nightheart cast an amused glance at Dustfall who gave the sisters the same look. "What do you think?"

"Well..." Dustfall pondered. "Did you bring prey to the elders?"

"I did this morning and Sagepaw did just a few moments ago!" Hailpaw replied boldly.

"Did you see if Blackstorm needed any help today?" Nightheart twitched her tail.

"Yes, he told us that unless we could grow herbs from our whiskers then no." Sagepaw replied, Nightheart withheld laughter. *You can't fake Blackstorm's personality.*

"Did you check on Primroseheart?"

Both their eyes went wide, Nightheart knew that Dustfall was just messing with them. "Relax," She purred. 'You don't have to check on Primroseheart, she *just* moved into the nursery. "I think you two have done great, so yes you can come to the gathering tonight."

The two she-cats exclaimed with delight and purred loudly, running off to prepare. "That was just cruel." Nightheart muttered to Dustfall who let out a chuckle.

"I have to make sure that they're on their toes." Dustfall laughed before going to the nursery to see Primroseheart, she was barely expecting but she had moved to the nursery due to her naeusa.

Meanwhile, Nightheart sought out Rabbitspring who was talking with Haresong. "Hey there." Nightheart purred as she approached, resting her muzzle on Rabbitspring's head. "Ready for the gathering

tonight?"

"Of course," Rabbitspring purred. "Did you tell Sagepaw and Hailpaw they could come?"

"Yeah, after some intense drilling." Nightheart held her head high.

"Careful, you don't wanna scare them off." Rabbitspring teased.

"How's Dewpaw's training going?"

"She's doing well." Rabbitspring purred happily. "I was really nervous about training another cat, but she's so patient and listens very well."

"Great." Nightheart mewed. "We should get Dewpaw and Sagepaw into training together here soon."

"That would be fun."

Nightheart and Rabbitspring spoke with Haresong until it was time to leave for the gathering. Dewpaw and her siblings would be missing out, but there names would be celebrated by the other three Clans.

Nightheart and Rabbitspring met up with Sagepaw and the cats of AshClan set out into the forest. This was Sagepaw's first gathering, she missed her first one due to barely had being an apprentice and the second one she and Hailpaw had gotten in trouble for forgetting to bring prey to the elders.

This time, however, Nightheart was confident in bringing her apprentice. "So you know how to behave right?" She questioned her apprentice.

"Be respectful, don't fight with anyone." Sagepaw recited confidently.

"Yes, and you can be friendly with other apprentices from the other Clans, but remember not to get *too* close, and don't share any AshClan secrets."

"Understood, Nightheart." Sagepaw held her head high. "I'll make you proud, I promise."

"I know you will." Nightheart had a lot of respect for Sagepaw, she felt very close to the young she-cat just as she had felt close to Wheatwhisker. *I hope you're proud of me.* She thought, looking up towards the sky in hopes that her mentor was looking down on her.

AshClan arrived in the gathering hollow just after LichenClan, with MoonClan and SunClan already settling down in the hollow. The hollow was filled with cats conversing about Clan life. "Go ahead and try and make friends." Nightheart nudged, watching Sagepaw run off with Hailpaw.

While waiting for the leaders to start, Nightheart met the sharp amber gaze of Falconheart from across the hollow. He was sitting with Sedgefern, they shared a respectful nod. Nightheart's perspective on Falconheart had really shifted. *He's a strong warrior, we both are.*

At long last, the four leaders took their place on the center stone, looking out over the crowd. "If you don't mind," Shadowstar began. "I'd like to start us off."

"Go right ahead." Riverstar nodded.

"A few days ago, Peachblossom moved into the nursery expecting Breezetail's kits. Not long after, Mosswind's kits were made into apprentices. Please welcome Meadowpaw, Minnowpaw and Shellpaw." The Clans cheered the new apprentices. "Other than that, greenleaf has been treating us well. StarClan blessed us a moor full of rabbits and a river full of fish."

"That's great news." Riverstar purred. "AshClan also welcomes three new apprentices, Mistpaw, Slatepaw and Dewpaw. Primroseheart also moved into the nursery expecting Dustfall's kits." *Very similar news.* She thought with amusement. *But kits are always good news, even for the other Clans.*

"LichenClan is happy to welcome four healthy kits born to Rowanwhisker, Marshkit, Fennelkit, Pinekit and Shrewkit!" The

Clans cheered loudly. "Other than that, LichenClan is doing incredibly well this season."

Timberstar sat down and Dawnstar rose to her paws. "SunClan has had quite an eventful moon. Heatherflight gave birth, but unfortunately lost both of her kits." There was a long moment of silence. *It's never good when kits don't even get a chance to live.* "However, Briarrose went into an unexpected early kitting and gave birth to five tiny kits. They were sick, and one of them unfortunately died but thanks to our medicine cats, Owlkit, Rushkit, Oakkit and Blossomkit are living healthy at their mother's belly."

Unexpected? Nightheart thought in confusion. *How does a queen unexpectedly give birth?* Despite the death of three SunClan kits, the rest of the Clans cheered for the four lives hat made it. "Finally we welcome Bluepaw, Snowpaw and Windpaw as apprentices." As the Clans cheered, Nightheart thought about how both the new SunClan apprentices as well as the MoonClan apprentices were born on the journey to the mountains. *I can't believe it's been six moons since then.*

"With our news out of the way, we should enjoy this beautiful night." Dawnstar purred and the four leaders jumped down from the rock. Nightheart watched as Blackstorm and Honeyfrost engaged in conversation, they were clearly happy to be talking together. In the short moments that Honeyfrost and Nightheart had spent together under the capture of Echoheart, she had begun to understand the feelings between her and Blackstorm. *They've learned how to maintain a professional relationship without having to destroy their feelings.*

Nightheart decided she should start mingling with the other cats, she spotted Rabbitspring talking to Berryheart of MoonClan. Berryheart, along with her sister, Peachblossom were rogues who were forced to fight alongside Echoheart. Berryheart had been severely wounded, but once they made their home in MoonClan she recovered well. At first Nightheart had been slightly skeptical, but then she remembered that AshClan had a former rogue as well.

Primroseheart had made her home in AshClan and now she was giving life to her Clan. Nightherat padded through the crowd to join up with Berryheart and Rabbitspring. "Good evening." Nightheart

bowed her head to the former rogue. "How are you doing tonight?"

"I'm doing well, thank you." Berryheart purred. "I love living with MoonClan, it was a little hard at first, adjusting to the warrior code and StarClan and all that, but both Peachblossom and I are happy."

"Especially Peachblossom by the sounds of it!" Rabbitspring purred loudly. "Kits are always fun."

"Oh yes we're both very excited." Berryheart waved her tail happily. "Both Peachblossom and I have always wanted kits, and now she's going to have some."

"Any kits in your future?" Nightheart pressed.

"Soon, I hope." Berryheart replied. "Peachblossom instantly hit it off with Breezetail, he was very welcoming to both of us but they fell for each other very fast. There *might* be a tom in MoonClan that I'm interested in, but I'm happy to enjoy my life as a warrior first."

Nightheart enjoyed her conversation with Berryheart and they conversed until it was time for the gathering to come to a close. Nightheart met up with Sagepaw as AshClan gathered in front of their tree. "How was it? Did you make any friends?"

"Yeah!" Sagepaw exclaimed. "Me and Hailpaw met Hollypaw and Burnpaw of SunClan who introduced us to Ferretpaw, Swanpaw and Mothpaw of MoonClan. It was really fun!"

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself." Nightheart purred happily. "Tomorrow we go back to normal training so rest up tonight."

"I will, Nightheart." Sagepaw promised before bounding off to Stormheart, presumably to tell him about her night. As AshClan ventured back to their home, Nightheart took a moment to think about how happy she was, the season was great for AshClan, she had a wonderful mate and an eager apprentice. *I hope this happiness lasts forever.*

Chapter 14

"Go for the wings, pull the bird down and kill it quickly." Nightheart instructed, looking over the four apprentices ahead of her. "Catching birds is difficult so I don't expect the younger ones of you lot to catch one today, Sagepaw and Hailpaw haven't even managed to catch birds yet."

After Nightheart's explanation, a sharp scoff came from Slatepaw. "Problem?" She questioned sharply.

"I *bet* I can catch a bird before the day is over." Slatepaw vowed.

"Oh, yeah?" Nightheart sneered. "Big talk for an apprentice just out of the nursery."

"And I'm already better than any apprentice in the forest." *Unlikely.*

"Slatepaw." Leafdawn hissed sharply, silencing her apprentice. *So Slatepaw's got a big head on his shoulders.* Nightheart thought slyly.

Nightheart lifted her tail to silence Leafdawn. "So, Slatepaw." Nightheart approached the apprentice. "You think that you're so great you're willing to bet on it?"

"Absolutely." Arrogance burned brightly in Slatepaw's amber eyes.

"Fine then. If you can catch a bird today then you won't have to take care of the elders for a whole moon." His eyes sparkled. "But if you *don't* catch a bird, then taking care of the elders will fall solely on your shoulders for the next moon."
"You're on." Slatepaw declared and started to run into the forest. "I'll blow you all away!"

Leafdawn scoffed and glared at Nightheart. "The last thing he needs is encouragement." She didn't seem really mad, Nightheart could only imagine the frustration of having to mentor a cat like that. *I can only imagine what Cherryleaf went through with Falconheart!*

"Sorry." Nightheart replied sheepishly then turned back to the other apprentices and mentors. "Meanwhile, let's get the rest of you chasing birds."

At the end of their hunting session, both Hailpaw and Sagepaw caught themselves a sparrow, Dewpaw didn't manage to but made great progress on her technique. They regrouped in the training area. "No Slatepaw and Leafdawn yet." She muttered, looking around for the pair.

"Do you really think Slatepaw will be able to catch a bird?" Hailpaw questioned Nightheart. "He's only been an apprentice for a few days."

"I kind of hope he doesn't." Nightheart snorted. "A cat like that needs a check on his ego."

"I heard Ashblaze was the exact same way when he was an apprentice." Dustfall added. "But Ashblaze also had a lot of skill to back it up."

"We'll have to see if Slatepaw is the same way." Rabbitspring flicked her tail. After a few moments, Nightheart heard pawsteps in the forest and after a few moments, Leafdawn and Slatepaw stepped into view.

Nightheart's jaw dropped when she saw that securely in Slatepaw's jaws, was a finch. He dropped it at Nightheart's paws, a look on his face so smug it would make Falconheart seem like Rabbitspring. "Told you." He lashed his tail. Nightheart met Leafdawn's gaze, it was a mixture of annoyance and pride. Slatepaw stormed off with his head high in the air, tail waving behind him. He headed back to camp leaving Nightheart in a stunned silence.

None of the cats really had anything to say, they all padded back to camp with their prey in tow. *I can't believe he actually did it.* Nightheart thought, genuinely impressed. *He wasn't wrong when he said he had the skill, but still; that kind of ego isn't a good thing.* They reached camp and Slatepaw was boasting about his catch to anyone who would hear, including Mistpaw who had returned from a patrol. *He's going to be a pawful.*

The day came to an end and after helping herself to some prey with Rabbitspring, the two she-cats settled down in the warriors den together and Nightheart very quickly fell into a deep, sound sleep.

Nightheart was woken by the foul stench of rotting bark, she opened her eyes and her chest swelled with anger as she realized she was back in the Dark Forest. "Haven't I made myself clear, or are you going deaf?" She yelled into the shadows, knowing that Thornstar was lurking somewhere in the darkness.

"Oh I've heard you loud and clear, Nightheart." Thornstar's voice spoke, but Nightheart only saw his shadow. "But I've chosen to simply not listen. You see, I've invested far too much time into you."

"I already know how to get out of this disgusting place." She spat. "So don't waste your time, I'm not playing your dumb little game. I've got my own duties as a warrior to attend to."

"Yes of course, you've been given quite the responsibility in training an apprentice, haven't you?"

"Just get to the point, Thornstar." She snarled.

"I want you to train with me again, Nightheart. You're wasting your potential. Your mother is now in this forest with me and she wants the same, you could be so much stronger. You could *lead* AshClan."

"I'm not the same cat I was when I was an apprentice, the only way I want to lead AshClan is if I'm chosen to be deputy. I'm not going to kill any cat to get my way, unlike you."

"You can judge me all you want, Nightheart, but you knew exactly what you were getting in to when you started training with me. Don't act all high and mighty."

"I was stupid." Nightheart admitted. "But you wanted me to become a killer, I'm not a killer."

"No," Thornstar's voice was chilling, it made the fur along her spine rise. "But I am." At long last, Thornstar stepped into the dim light, his amber eyes glinting dangerously. "You see, Nightheart. You can train with me, *or* I can bring *other* cats into this forest. Maybe

Sagepaw would benefit from a mentor like me."

"You won't touch her." Nightheart hissed, stepping forward with her claws extended.

"Maybe not," He sneered. "After all your brother is protected by StarClan, but Rabbitspring isn't."

Red-hot rage filled Nightheart's entire body and she lost control of herself. She ran forward and slammed into Thornstar, her claws ripping into his already scarred pelt. She felt his blood spray onto her dark pelt and his claws fighting back in return. Nightheart didn't let him get the upper paw on her.

She sank her teeth deep into his shoulder and drove his paw directly into his ribs, pinning him down against the forest floor. "If you *ever* touch a hair on Rabbitspring's pelt then I'll make sure we *both* find out if dead cats can die again."

Thornstar had genuine shock in his eyes. *I'm stronger than him.* Nightheart released her grip on Thornstar and turned away, lashing her tail. "I knew you had the heart of a killer." He sneered through his teeth.

"No, Thornstar." She turned around to face him. "I have the heart of a warrior."

Chapter 15

"Bluepaw, why don't you mark the border." Falconheart instructed his apprentice. "It's a key part of patrolling."

"Sure!" Bluepaw eagerly marked the border and his patrol carried onward. He had really enjoyed training Bluepaw the past few days. She was energetic and sometimes didn't take her training seriously, but when she did focus she made great progress. She caught her first piece of prey a few days ago, before both Windpaw and Snowpaw and she was incredibly proud of herself.

With hardwork and dedication, Bluepaw will grow into a fine warrior. Falconheart thought happily, he would treasure the days he spent training this hopeful young she-cat but he was also so eager to see how she would grow and mature into a SunClan warrior.

They continued their patrol along the MoonClan border when he noticed Bluepaw gazing across the river into MoonClan territory. "So that's where the battle against Echoheart was fought?"

Falconheart nodded. "Kind of," He mewed. "It was closer to the other end of the territory."

"Was it scary?" Bluepaw inquired.

"Battles can always be scary," Falconheart explained. "Especially since I was really scared for Honeyfrost, but in the end warriors always manage to find their courage to defend their Clans."

"Will I fight in a battle?"

"I'm sure someday you will, but as of right now SunClan and AshClan have a truce, and we've never really been at odds with MoonClan. So, it won't be for a while at least. Still, battle training is always good to have. We could encounter foxes, badgers, rogues or anything. It's good for a warrior to be prepared."

"I'll kick any creature's tail!" Bluepaw declared.

"Careful," Mudfall spoke from the back of the patrol. "It looks like Falconheart's ego is rubbing off on you." Falconheart rolled his eyes, his kin was always bitter about something, though lately Mudfall had seemed a little lighter on his paws.

"Don't be so hard on her," Dovepool nudged Mudfall, looking at him with soft eyes that seemed to melt the ice across Mudfall's expression. *So that's it.* Falconheart thought with amusement.

Mudfall seemed to notice the way that Falconheart was looking at him and cleared his throat awkwardly casting his eyes towards the forest floor. "We uh--we should get back to camp, it's almost sundown."

Falconheart chuckled and led his patrol back across the stream and into SunClan camp. As they reached the camp, Dovepool padded away with Mudfall following her like a lovesick hare. *So there actually is a cat who can get to Mudfall.* Falconheart told Bluepaw she could get prey with her sisters and quickly reported to Cinderflame before seeking out Segdefern.

"How was patrol? How did Bluepaw do?" She questioned, resting her tail across her paws.

"She did great, she's very curious and eager to learn." Falconheart replied proudly. "How's Windpaw doing?"

"She's doing great." Sedgefern purred loudly. "She caught her very first squirrel today, it was almost half her size!"

"That's a good catch."

"It is." Segdefern's voice trailed off and he realized that she was staring at him. Her green eyes soft as moss, warming him from ear to tail tip. Falconheart's heart began to pound inside of his chest at her sight.

"Is uh--is everything okay?" Falconheart questioned, shuffling his paws.

"I just--" She looked away sheepishly. "I really enjoy spending time with you, Falconheart." Her voice was tender and soothing to his ears. "I-"

"Sedgefern." Falconheart interrupted her. "I know what you want to say, and I just--" He dropped his head in shame. "I just don't know if I'm ready. I've been waiting for the right time, stupid I know."

"No, it's not stupid." Sedgefern dropped her head. "I shouldn't force it, I just--" She took a deep breath and met his gaze once more. "No, I know that you need your time. You're working through something and I understand that. I'll always be by your side to support you, just promise me when you *do* find the right time, you'll tell me right away."

Falconheart was overwhelmed by Sedgefern's compassion. *She's being so patient with me, she's being so understanding. I must be the luckiest tom in the forest.* "You'll be the first to know." Sedgefern's eyes sparkled and she rose to her paws. "Now come on, let's get some rest. We should take Windpaw and Bluepaw out hunting tomorrow."

"I'd love that." Falconheart purred and rose to his paws, following Sedgefern but before they stepped into the den he stopped her. "Oh, and thank you Sedgefern."

"Of course." She touched her muzzle to his head, making his entire pelt burn. "Just make sure it's worth the wait." Feeling lovesick, Falconheart followed her into the warriors den and curled up in his nest right beside hers. *She's so perfect, and when the time comes, I'll make sure she knows that.*

Falconheart was back in the Dark Forest, he hissed in annoyance and looked around. *He just isn't giving me a break, is he?* "Where are you, Falconclaw? Didn't get all your anger out on me last time?"

"You shouldn't ever assume on who you're talking to." A deep, unfamiliar voice spoke and a strange brown tabby tom stepped out of the shadows. His pelt was slightly faded, Falconheart could see the trees through his tabby stripes. "You could get yourself killed."

Something about this tom felt wrong, Falconheart's claws extended without him even thinking. "Who are you?" He demanded.

"My name is Oakpelt." He replied, his voice emotionless. "I was an old SunClan warrior, long before you, your mother or even Falconclaw came along.

"Yeah?" Falconheart lashed his tail. "You're in this place, so you're clearly evil."

"By StarClan's definition, yes."

"What does that mean?"

"Ravenwing was a medicine cat of SunClan when I was around, he fell in love with my sister and had kits. This is strictly against the warrior code so I killed him, I tried to kill his disgusting kits but I died before I could."

Falconheart's blood went colder. *He tried to kill a medicine cat and kits?* "The warrior code is against killing, especially against kits."

"I punished a codebreaker by breaking the warrior code, I'll be able to live with myself." Oakpelt stepped closer. "Of course, codebreaks will always be around, won't they?"

"What are you talking about?" Falconheart flattened his ears.

"Your sister." For the first time since showing himself, Oakpelt's expression twisted into something dark.

"What about my sister."

"While she was an apprentice, your sister snuck around in the shadows meeting up with Blackstorm, the *AshClan* medicine cat." Oakpelt flexed his claws. "So many rules broken."

Falconheart's eyes went wide. *Honeyfrost and Blackstorm?* For a moment, Falconheart couldn't believe what he was hearing. *Honeyfrost is such a good medicine cat how could she--No! He's distracting me, I'll talk to Honeyfrost about this later.* "What does it matter? It doesn't matter what she did in the past, Honeyfrost will

always be my sister and I won't let a rotting cat like you touch her."

"You won't *let* me?" Oakpelt snickered. "Oh Falconheart, that means you'll have to be able to *stop* me."

Oakpelt moved faster than Falconheart's mind could comprehend and in an instant his body slammed into the ground, claws ripping into his tabby pelt. Falconheart yowled in pain and lashed out. He dug his hind paws into Oakpelt's belly, it only lessened the Dark Forest tom's grip slightly, but it was enough for Falconheart to slip out from under him.

Falconheart braced himself for the next attack, but he still wasn't prepared enough. Oakpelt sunk his claws into both of Falconheart's shoulders, violently throwing him to the side. Oakpelt raced after him, reaching Falconheart before he hit the ground. His claws tore across Falconheart's pelt, he felt intense pain and blood welling up in the claw marks.

I can't even keep up with him. Falconheart quickly rolled away and jumped up to his paws. *I can't think, I just have to fight!* He launched himself forward, his claws slashing across Oakpelt's chest. It was a good blow, but not enough compared to the damage that had already been done to Falconheart.

Oakpelt charged forward and Falconheart braced himself for another attack, but Oakpelt surprised him by going low. He went underneath Falconheart and sank his claws into his ribs. He had incredible amounts of strength, the pain was blinding. Falconheart was quickly flipped onto his back, his head slamming into the ground and his vision blurring.

Oakpelt pressed his claws against Falconheart's throat, ready to tear it wide open. *He's trying to kill me.* Falconheart pressed his paws as hard as he could into Oakpelt's chest, sinking his claws deep into his pelt. It slowed Oakpelt down slightly but Falconheart could feel the razor sharp tips of Oakpelt's claws pressing into his neck, drawing thin amounts of blood to the surface of his pelt.

"And Falconclaw said you were skilled." Oakpelt spat. "I'd happily watch you bleed out right before me, but I don't think Falconclaw

would appreciate that." He let Falconheart up, his wounds burning painfully and his heart racing. For a moment, he thought he was genuinely going to die. "Consider this a warning, Falconheart." Oakpelt licked the blood off his paws. "Not from me, but from Falconclaw."

Before Falconheart could respond, his eyes were forced open and he was back in the warrior's den. "Falconheart!" Sedgefern cried out. "What happened to you?" Falconheart's pelt was covered in blood, his wounds had followed him to the waking world. Falconheart quickly slapped his tail over Sedgefern's mouth, she looked at him in horror.

"Sssh." He hissed as their denmates started to stir slightly. "Just--follow me." Falconheart quickly rose from his nest and rushed out of the den, his wounds blurring his vision. "Please don't yell." he told Sedgefern once they stepped out into the moonlight.

"What in the name of StarClan happened to you?" Sedgefern demanded, keeping her voice low. "You were tossing and turning like a fox in a fit and when I woke up you were covered in blood!"

Falconheart sighed harshly. "I-I'll explain everything in the morning, I promise." Sedgefern didn't seem happy with his answer.

"Are-are you okay?" She questioned, looking over him.

"Yes." Falconheart mewed sternly. "I'm going to go see, Honeyfrost." *I should probably bring up what Oakpelt told me.*

"Fine." Sedgefern dropped her head. "Just--please tell me." She turned away slowly, dragging her tail back into the warriors den. Guilt swarmed Falconheart's mind but he couldn't handle this right now. *I have no choice but to tell her now, there's no explanation for this.* Falconheart padded up to the medicine cat den, no cat other than Yarrowtail was allowed in there so Falconheart had to find another way to get Honeyfrost's attention.

I have to do this without waking Pebblestep, Briarrose or any of those kits. Falconheart could spot Honeyfrost's golden and white pelt curled up in her nest. Falconheart located a small pebble and placed

it just in front of Honeyfrost's nest. He flicked it forward with his paw and hit Honeyfrost with it.

She twitched and lifted her head, looking very tired and confused. She met Falconheart's gaze and could clearly see how urgent it was. She groggily rose to her paws and stepped out of the den. "Falconheart what--" She saw the blood splattered across his pelt and her eyes went wide. "Great StarClan Falconheart were you fighting badgers in the middle of the night?"

"Come here," Falconheart nudged Honeyfrost forward so they were out of sight from Icepetal who was guarding the camp.

"So what happened to you?" Honeyfrost demanded.

"Do you remember when we were younger and I told you I was being trained by a StarClan warrior in my dreams?"

Honeyfrost nodded. "Yeah and it was causing you to get hurt--" her eyes went wide. "Are you *still* doing that? And it caused *this* what kind of StarClan--"

Falconheart raised his tail. "I didn't understand what was happening back then, but I do now." He went into detail explaining that he found out that he was being trained by Falconclaw, a Dark Forest warrior. He explained that Nightheart was a part of it too and ended on him being attacked by Oakpelt. He left out the part where he learned about Honeyfrost and Blackstorm.

"Wow." Honeyfrost breathed out. "Falconheart you can't keep doing this. These cats are dangerous."

"Yeah," Falconheart dropped his head. "I see that now, but--he's been threatening me and--you."

"Me?"

Falconheart sighed. "Oakpelt told me that you had a relationship with Blackstorm."

Honeyfrost quickly looked away, looking very flustered. "Oh, yeah, that."

"Look, Honeyfrost." Falconheart sighed. "I can see that you're not doing that anymore, and I don't want you to get hurt but this cat *killed* a medicine cat for breaking the rules. I don't want him to try and do the same to you. He--he might try and hurt Sedgefern too."

Honeyfrost looked back, relief flooding her eyes. "You need to tell her, and you need to tell our mother. She can help."

"I know." Falconheart just didn't want to admit it. "I know, I know." He repeated. "I just don't want Sedgefern to hate me."
"I see the way she looks at you, Falconheart." Honeyfrost nudged him. "She won't, she never could. You just have to put your trust into her."

Falconheart took a deep breath. "Okay, I'll tell her tomorrow."

"For now," Honeyfrost rose to her paws. "Let me treat those wounds."

Chapter 16

How hard can it be? Falconheart asked himself over and over. *I just have to tell her.* He had returned to his nest and didn't sleep after Honeyfrost had treated him. His wounds didn't follow as majorly as he had previously though. Honeyfrost had been completely amazed by the amount of blood on his pelt from such a small amount of wounds.

Most of Falconheart's pain had lingered, but faded with Honeyfrost's help. He laid in his nest, thinking about what was going to happen. He had almost been killed in his dreams, he didn't know what would happen if Oakpelt would have actually ripped his throat open. *Would I have died?* Regardless, he didn't want to go to the Dark Forest anymore.

The horror on Sedgefern's face had been almost too much for him to bear. He didn't want to hurt her, he didn't want her to be scared. He kept his eyes closed and his breathing low so when Sedgefern woke at dawn, she thought he was sleeping. Falconheart felt her sniff his pelt and breathe out a quiet sigh. "I just want to help you." She whispered into his ear, causing it to twitch and his heart to ache. *She's too good for me.* He thought painfully.

Falconheart remained in his nest for as long as he possibly could, thinking about what he would say to Sedgefern, how he would explain everything that he had done. As his Clanmates started to stir around him, Falconheart knew he would have to rise and face Sedgefern eventually, and he didn't want the rest of his Clanmates to suspect anything.

He finally rose from his nest, his entire body aching and climbed out of the warriors den. His eyes scanned the camp for Sedgefern, but she wasn't anywhere in sight. *Did she go on the dawn patrol?* He noticed Dovepool and Petalbreeze talking in front of the fresh-kill pile so he decided to ask them.

"Do you know where Sedgefern is? I need to talk to her."

Falconheart quickly explained. The look Dovepool gave him was sharper than her claws, Petalbreeze didn't seem as upset.

"She's on the dawn patrol, she should be back soon." Petalbreeze explained.

"She also seemed really upset today," Dovepool growled. "If you hurt her again I swear I--"

Petalbreeze slapped her tail over Dovepool's muzzle. "This isn't our place, Sedgefern *was not* happy with us the last time we meddled. Falconheart is a smart cat, if he knows what's good for him he'll fix it."

"Right," Falconheart mewed awkwardly. "Thanks, Petalbreeze." He walked away from the two she-cats feeling very aware of Dovepool's glare. As he padded away he noticed Bluepaw was racing up to him. *I can't train her right now.* He thought.

"Good morning, Falconheart!" She announced boldly. "What are we doing today?"

"I have something to do right now, so why don't you and your sisters change the bedding for the elders." As Bluepaw's expression fell he rested his tail on her shoulder. "Boring I know, but all apprentices have to do it. Afterwards we'll do some fight training, okay?"

"Okay!" With her spirits lifted, Bluepaw ran off to talk to Snowpaw and Windpaw. Falconheart sighed in relief, but movement at the camp entrance destroyed that relief completely. The dawn patrol had returned, Flamepetal was at the head of it with Rosewind, Hollypaw, Cherryleaf, Adderstrike and Sedgefern. Sedgefern's green eyes were distant, she clearly didn't have her heart in the patrol.

Falconheart sighed again, his claws scraping against the stone hollow. The patrol broke up as Flamepetal went to report to Cinderflame and Falconheart caught Sedgefern's gaze. He gave her a sheepish look and she closed her eyes for a moment, as if asking herself if she *really* wanted to talk to him.

Much to his relief, Sedgefern started padding across the hollow towards him. "How are you?"

"Better, but--" He sighed. "We need to talk."

"Yeah," She dropped her head.

"Follow me." Falconheart rested his tail on Sedgefern's back and led her out of camp, they settled down in a small clearing not far from camp and he faced Sedgefern. As he opened his mouth to speak, suddenly his throat became drier than a bone. *Speak you idiot!* He cursed himself and coughed slightly. "I uh--" He took a deep breath as Sedgefern waited patiently for him to explain. *Just start talking.*

"Do you know who Falconclaw is?" He started with a simple question.

Sedgefern thought for a moment. "I don't think so."

"He used to be a SunClan warrior, he was Thornstar's uncle and mentor. He tried killing Flowerstar and killed her mentor and Sandfoot's father Owlfoot. He was found dead not long after."

"Wow." Sedgefern mewed in shock. "No wonder I haven't heard of him. He sounds terrible."

"He is." Falconheart dropped his head. "Well--when I was an apprentice I was visited by a cat in my dreams. He offered to train me, to make me into a great warrior."

"It was Falconclaw, wasn't it?"

Falconheart nodded slowly. "I didn't know who he was at first, but--when I did find out...I kept training with him. I liked what he was able to teach me, I didn't think anything of it. I later learned that Nightheart of AshClan was being trained by Thornstar, for much the same reason as me. They made us fight and she realized that they were turning us into killers. I was so stupid and didn't notice.

"I had developed such a dark instinct that I didn't even notice, I was losing myself in battles and because of it--I killed Ashblaze. After all that, I fought with Falconclaw but he just told me that I just a

monster, just like him. He doesn't like the fact that I'm getting close to you for multiple reasons, one because your a descendant of Dovewish, a former kittypet and because he thinks mates do nothing but distract us.

"Last night I was attacked by another cat named Oakpelt who almost *killed* me and he told me it was a warning. I don't *want* to do this anymore, I don't want to have to fear each night that I'm going to wake up there and I don't want anything to happen to you or Honeyfrost because they've threatened you before, I just--I just want to go back to being a normal warrior." He slumped his shoulders, a lot of what he said he didn't even realize until he spat all the words out like a rambling fool. "Though I'm sure you hate me now."

"Oh, Falconheart," She breathed out. "I don't hate you." She dropped her head, touching her muzzle to his shoulder. "I could *never* hate you." She intertwined his tail with hers. "You made a mistake and it's still haunting you, no one can fault you for wanting to be a great warrior. I'm just glad you finally told me. I *knew* something was wrong, and I'm so glad you finally told me."

Falconheart enjoyed her warmth and sweet scent. "I just--I don't know how to break away from him. Not when he can just visit me each time I go to sleep."

"You should talk to your mother, I bet she can help you." Sedgefern urged.

"Yeah, I know." Falconheart sighed. "It feels good to talk to you, it always has."
"I'm just glad you're alright, I was so scared last night." She touched her muzzle to his cheek. "Don't scare me like that I again you mousebrain."
"I am a warrior afterall," Falconheart chuckled. "No promises."

Falconheart enjoyed his moment with Sedgefern, terrified of what came next. He would have to open to his mother next and tell her *everything* that he had just dumped onto both Honeyfrost and Sedgefern.

"Well," Sedgefern spoke again, her voice was soft as heather. "Know

that no matter what happens, I'll be by your side through it all. I promise."

"Thank you, Sedgefern." Falconheart took a deep breath, because deep down he knew that as long as he had Sedgefern, he could do anything.

Chapter 17

Sagepaw's expression was focused and determined, her green eyes burning with a fierce fire deep inside of them. Nightheart watched her apprentice through the undergrowth, she had no idea that she was being watched. The tabby she-cat slunk through the pine trees, her eyes affixed to a plump squirrel a few tail lengths away. Her crouch was perfect, in a moment she would capture her prey.

Sagepaw took a silent step forward, moving silently through the pine needles. Nightheart held her breath as Sagepaw leapt forward. Everything was perfect, but the squirrel became quickly aware of Sagepaw and darted up the closest tree. Sagepaw landed at the base of the tree, kicking up pine needles. *She did everything right.* Nightheart thought, able to see the frustration on her face. She cursed under her breath and continued her hunt.

Nightheart followed her apprentice, Sagepaw had been doing well on the assessment and that was the only prey she had missed. *Sometimes the prey just gets the better of us.* Nightheart noted to herself, she would have to tell that to Sagepaw later. She also took losses hard, but learned from them.

Sagepaw quickly located another squirrel and this time, she made sure that she would catch her prey. Her paws nailed the squirrel and she killed it quickly. With pride burning in her gaze, Sagepaw continued. Nightheart really enjoyed these assessments. She liked watching Sagepaw on her own time, she liked seeing what she did when she was alone. Sagepaw worked hard, she stayed focused and never lost sight of her goals.

She's shaping into a fine young warrior. Nightheart thought proudly and continued following her apprentice until Sagepaw had managed to catch three more pieces of prey. Nightheart was satisfied with her apprentice's performance so she stepped out of the shadows and approached Sagepaw. "Good work out there." Nightheart bowed her head. "Let's meet Dustfall and your sister back at the clearing."

Nightheart helped Sagepaw gather her prey and she couldn't help but notice how nervous her apprentice seemed. *She's worried about the squirrel she missed.* Nightheart realized, but she only missed a single piece of prey. Nightheart gently touched her tail to Sagepaw's flank, trying to reassure her.

By the time Nightheart and Sagepaw reached the clearing, Dustfall and Hailpaw were already there. "Welcome back." Dustfall bowed his head. "Shall we go over the assessment?"

"Sure." Nightheart sat down, facing the two apprentices. "You lead."

"Very well," Dustfall cleared his throat. "Hailpaw, your hunting skills are getting sharper with each passing day. You're a delight to train and I am excited to see you soon perfect your skills." Hailpaw's eyes shimmered at Dustfall's praise, now it was Nightheart's turn.

"Sagepaw, you have gone from a clumsy apprentice to a mature, brave she-cat with the paws of a deadly warrior. Despite missing a catch, you kept going strong. Sometimes our prey is just too quick to catch, even the most skilled warrior can miss a catch. You are an amazing apprentice, I can't wait for the day when I can say you passed your warrior assessment."

"Thank you, Nightheart." Sagepaw was clearly warmed by Nightheart's words. "You're an amazing mentor."

"A mentor is only as good as her apprentice." Nightheart touched her muzzle to Sagepaw's forehead. "Now let's get back to camp!"

Sagepaw and Hailpaw enjoyed the rest of their day resting after passing their assessments and Nightheart spent the rest of her day with Rabbitspring at her side. When the moon overtook the sky, they settled into their nests for another night of sleep. Nightheart found sleep hard to come by, she could feel Rabbitspring twitching more than usual beside her. She hoped that her mate was alright and just having a bad dream.

When Nightheart finally slipped into slumber, she found herself in an unfamiliar forest. She was surrounded by large oak trees, the sweet scent of prey surrounded her. The stars above burned

brightly, so she knew she wasn't in the Dark Forest. "Hello?" She called into the night, hoping for a response.

Nightheart didn't hear a voice, but instead heard pawsteps pounding against the grass along with heavy breathing. A cat exploded out of the undergrowth and Nightheart jumped back in alarm. "Thank the stars there you are!" The cat who stood before Nightheart was a beautiful, sleek silver tabby she-cat with stark black stripes. "You need to come with me!"

"Who are you?" Nightheart demanded, this she-cat had stars in her pelt. *A StarClan cat.* "My name is Moonwhisker, and we don't have time. *Moonwhisker, my aunt.* "Rabbitspring is in trouble!"

Those words turned Nightheart's blood to ice. "What? Where is she?"

"Follow me!" Moonwhisker and NIghtheart broke into a sprint through the trees. "She's in the Dark Forest, I brought you here so that you can help her."

Nightheart ran as fast as she possibly could, her heart pounding in her chest. *No. StarClan please no! Don't let anything happen to her!* In the distance, Nightheart could see the stars begin to fade and the stench of rotting leaves and prey filled the air. *There it is.* She saw the dark trees, and anger filled her entire body.

Moonwhisker skidded to a sudden stop as the forest began to die. "This is as far as I can go, but she's in there. Go to her, Nightheart."

Nightheart didn't stop to ask questions, she raced across the border into the Dark Forest, the scent of rotting plant life distorted her ability to track, but she had a small idea of what the Dark Forest looked like. She ran as fast as she could, her heart pounding in her chest. *Where are you, Rabbitspring?*

After running for what felt like moons, Nightheart finally heard voices. She instantly recognized the deep voice of Thornstar. "You can blame this on Nightheart,"

No! Nightheart caught sight of the white on Rabbitspring's pelt,

glowing amongst the shadows. *I'm here!* Nightheart exploded into the clearing where they stood. It was Thornstar, Rabbitspring, and Thornstar's son, Thrushclaw. *Two against one, cowards!* As Thrushclaw stepped towards, Rabbitspring, his claws glinting in the darkness. Nightheart slammed her body into Thrushclaw's sending the scrawny tom across the clearing. Rabbitspring yelled in surprise and Thrushclaw let out a pained cry of alarm.

Nightheart raked her claws violently across his pale tabby pelt, blood poured from his wounds and he scrambled away from Nightheart. "Big mistake!" She spat and spun around to face Thornstar.

"How lovely of you to join us, Nightheart." Thornstar twitched his tail, eyes sparking with annoyance.

"I warned you what would happen if you threatened her." Nightheart snarled. "You thought I was joking?"

"No but you seemed to think that *I* was." Thornstar dropped his voice, Thrushclaw had recovered and was now back at his father's side, baring his teeth. "I warned you what would happen if you strayed away from this forest, Nightheart. You ignored me, so now you'll pay. Attack!"

Both Thornstar and Thrushclaw charged forward with claws bared. Nightheart yowled and rose to his challenge, she met Thornstar head on. Their bodies collide in a flurry of blood, teeth and claws. She felt his teeth sinking into her foreleg, but she raked her claws across his shoulders. She held her grip on his shoulders and slipped underneath him, kicking her hind legs into his belly.

Thornstar let out a sharp huff and Nightheart dragged her claws down his belly. Before Thornstar could react, Nightheart flipped onto her own belly and stood up underneath him, driving her sharp shoulders into his rib cage. Thornstar claws sank into her chest above her ribcage.

Nightheart hissed in pain and grit her teeth. She sank her claws into the damp earth and reared up on them, throwing him off balance. When Thornstar's grip loosened she tore away from his claws, it

hurt but at least she was away from him. Nightheart heard more fighting to the side, she saw Rabbitspring and Thrushclaw tangled a duel.

Rabbitspring bled from a wound on her foreleg but she appeared to be overpowering the Dark Forest tom despite being much smaller. Nightheart only had minor wounds that barely stung. "You can't beat us." Nightheart declared. "You're not as strong as you think you are, Thornstar. I'm a better warrior than you ever were."

Thornstar's eyes blazed at her words. "You may have won this time," He looked to his son. "Thrushclaw!" Thrushclaw and Rabbitspring broke away and Nightheart rushed to her mate's side, looking her over for wounds. "This isn't over, Nightheart. Trust me when I say this."

Nightheart ignored his words and faced Rabbitspring. "Are you alright?"

"I think so, how do we get out of here?"

"Just close your eyes and tell yourself to wake up." Nightheart touched her muzzle to Rabbitspring's and closed her eyes, in just a few short moments, Nightheart opened her eyes and she was back in the warrior's den. She lifted her head at the same time as Rabbitspring. "Follow me." She whispered and they rose to their paws, stepping out of the warriors den and slipping into the shadows to talk. Now that the fight was over, the angered had faded and guilt swarmed into her heart. "Rabbitspring I am so, so sorry." She dropped her head.

"Nightheart you don't have to apologize." Rabbitspring stepped in close, pressing her body up against Nightheart's. She breathed in her sweet and comforting scent. "You warned me about this when you first told me," Rabbitspring stepped back and looking at Nightheart with concern in her eyes. "But you *need* to do something about this--how did you even find me in there?"

Nightheart suddenly recalled Moonwhisker. "I was visited by Moonwhisker, she told me you were in danger."
"Moonwhisker is..." Rabbitspring clearly didn't know.

"She was the medicine cat before Skyfeather, Echoheart and Riverstar's sister. She was killed by Echoheart." Nightheart quickly explained.

"Well," Rabbitspring breathed out. "You might have to get help for this, you should tell Riverstar or your brother about this. Blackstorm has connections to StarClan, he should be able to help.

Nightheart's biggest regret in her life had been the training she did with Thornstar, she wanted nothing more than to leave her past in the Dark Forest behind her, but that clearly wasn't an option. *I can handle the occasional scrap with Thornstar, but now he's made it personal.*

Nightheart let out a heavy, regret filled sigh. "I know, Rabbitspring" She touched her muzzle to hers. "Just promise me you'll stay with me through all this, I can't do this without you."
"I promise, I'll *always* be by your side."

Chapter 18

Falconheart paced outside of the medicine cat den, for a moment he thought he would wear down a path into the floor of the stone hollow. "You shouldn't worry so much." Honeyfrost mewed, looking up from the herbs she was drying. "If anyone is going to understand, it's her. No one is going to think less of you for this, I promise."
"I know I know." Falconheart sighed heavily. "I just don't want to disappoint her, or Lionclaw, or *StarClan* for that matter." He looked up towards the cloudless blue sky. "I don't know if I can do this." His heart was beating faster than he could handle, he felt like he was going to pass out.

"You can, Falconheart. You *have* to." Honeyfrost pressed. She lifted her head and look passed him. "Here comes Sedgefern."

Falconheart turned to look over his shoulder as Sedgefern broke away from her border patrol, quickly padding up to Falconheart and Honeyfrost. "Have you told her yet?"

"Not yet." Honeyfrost answered for him, rising to her paws and walking away from her herbs. "But we need to." She shot a look at Falconheart.

Falconheart's pelt burned. "Will you come with me too, Sedgefern?"

"Of course." Sedgefern agreed. "We should go now though, we still have responsibilities as mentors."

"I know." Falconheart took another deep breath and was forced towards the leader's den by Honeyfrost and Sedgefern. *At least I have the two of them.* Falconheart thought hopefully.

"Come on." Sedgefern nudged Falconheart forward, towards Dawnstar's den. "We need to get this done, the sooner the better.

"Right." Falconheart cleared his throat and with Honeyfrost and Sedgefern at his side, he started walking towards the leader's den.

He was shocked at how long the walk seemed. Deep down he knew that Dawnstar wouldn't be mad at him, but he feared that she would be. *Dawnstar risked her life driving out an evil cat, what will she think of her own son who trained with one?* Shaking his head, Falconheart shoved those thoughts away. *No matter what happens, I have to own up to what I've done. Sedgefern and Honeyfrost are in danger. I owe it to them.*

At long last they reached Dawnstar's den. With a heavy sigh, Falconheart stepped into the dimly lit den. Inside, Dawnstar, Lionclaw and Cinderflame were conversing over some prey. Dawnstar lifted her head once the three of them stepped inside. "Hello there." She purred. "What can I do for you three?"

"I need to talk to you, Dawnstar." Falconheart forced the words out, like they were prey lodged in his throat. Dawnstar clearly sensed the urgency in Falconheart's words.

"Very well," She nodded and turned to Lionclaw and Cinderflame. "Will you give us a moment."

Lionclaw's amber eyes flashed concern as he rested his gaze on his kits. "Is everything alright?"

Falconheart nodded. "I think so." He assured his father. "I just need to talk to her, I will tell you later."

"I understand." He brushed his tail across Falconheart's pelt. Cinderflame and Lionclaw left the den and Dawnstar faced the three cats.

"So what do you have to say?"

Falconheart looked at Sedgefern for a moment, she gave him a nod of encouragement. "Well," Falconheart sighed. "We all know that I was a...arrogant apprentice. I wanted to be the best warrior in the forest, no matter what the cost. I wanted to prove I was better than anyone else. Well, one night in my dreams I was visited by what *I* thought was a StarClan warrior."

"Who was it?" Dawnstar questioned patiently.

"Falconclaw."

Dawnstar's expression shifted, she didn't seem mad just scared and guilty. "I was worried that may happen. He visited me not long after you two were born, and threatened you in particular. I was worried about what he would do, when you didn't say anything to me, I assumed that he just didn't try anything, I suppose I was foolish to think that."

"Please don't blame yourself." Falconheart urged. "I didn't stop to ask who he was, and even when I *learned* who he was. I didn't stop the training, he encouraged me to be violent and wanted me to become a killer like him." He chose to leave out the detail concerning Ashblaze. "When I started to question him, and started to break away from him he threatened me, Honeyfrost and Sedgefern. Then, last night I was almost killed by another cat named Oakpelt."

"Oh my," Dawnstar's eyes filled with horror. "Oh, Falconheart I had no idea that you were dealing with this."

"It's my own fault."

"I should have warned you about Falconclaw or told you who he was--" Falconheart could see that his mother was starting to be consumed by guilt, he raised her tail.

"No, it was my choice to start training with him. I don't want to anymore but I'm scared of what will happen if I try and break away completely. I don't want these two to get hurt because of me."

Dawnstar started to calm down. "I see." She sighed. "You're making the right choice, Falconheart. I'm glad you could come to me for help."

Falconheart was glad that his mother wasn't mad, it was as if a huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders. "So what can I do? How can I protect myself from him?"

"I'm not sure, but I know how to figure it out. You and I are going to the Spirit Garden."

Falconheart's jaw dropped. "Wh-what? How can I go to the Spirit Garden? I'm not a medicine cat."

"You don't have to be a medicine cat or leader to speak with StarClan. StarClan are here to guide us, from leaders, to medicine cats, to warrior. They will be happy to help you with Falconclaw."

A new brand of fear raced through Falconheart's body, he was going to the Spirit Garden to communicate directly with StarClan. "A-are you sure?"

"I'm positive." Dawnstar nodded slowly. "We should leave as soon as possible if we want to make it there by moonhigh." She looked past Falconheart and rested her eyes on Honeyfrost. 'Will you get us some travelling herbs?"

"Of course." Honeyfrost bowed her head and padded out of the den,

"I'm glad you came to me, Falconheart." Dawnstar mewed and looked at Sedgefern. "Personally, I want to thank you for supporting him." Falconheart's pelt began to burn.

"Of course, Dawnstar. Falconheart is one of the greatest cats in my life, I would do anything for him." Dawnstar's eyes softened and Falconheart looked at Dawnstar lovingly.

"We should prepare to leave, Falconheart. It's quite the walk." Falconheart took a moment to step outside the den and talk to Sedgefern.

"Thank you for your support." Falconheart mewed. "I don't think I could have done any of this without you."
"Of course." Sedgefern touched her muzzle to Falconheart's taking him by surprise. "Just get this whole situation fixed, I'll be waiting for you when you get back." Her sweet scent left Falconheart dazed, he stared off into space as she padded of.

Behind him, Honeyfrost cleared her throat. Falconheart jumped slightly and turned around to face his sister. She had a leaf wrap in her teeth, looking at him with amusement. He set down the wrap with amusement in her eyes. "Here you go. These will help with

your hunger, strength and energy."

"Thank you, Honeyfrost." Falconheart quickly ate the herbs, resisting the urge to gag at their bitter taste. "What am I supposed to do at the Spirit Garden? I never even went to the Moonstone in our old home."
"You don't really do anything." Honeyfrost replied. " You'll lay down in the Garden and breathe in the scent of the flowers. You'll fall asleep almost instantly, then you should wake up somewhere with a StarClan cat talking to you."

Falconheart sighed. "Alright, I guess I just have to deal with it. Thank you, Honeyfrost." He thanked her again and met up with Dawnstar at the camp's entrance.

"Ready?" She questioned.

"As I'll ever be." Falconheart reluctantly agreed and the two of them ventured into SunClan territory. As they were about halfway to the river, Dawnstar started to speak.

"Sedgefern is very sweet to you." Dawnstar purred. "It's cute."

"Yeah." Falconheart said softly, his pelt burning. "She's pretty amazing. I don't know what I would do without her."

"It's good to have someone like that at your side, I had your father with me during everything that happened to me. He kept my head above water." Dawnstar's eyes were distant as she thought about her past. "Yet you seem to be reluctant to become mates."

He had already had this conversation with Lionclaw, but a lot had happened. "I'm not reluctant, I just--" He sighed. "I want to do right by her, I don't want to put her in danger because of a choice I made."

"I understand," Dawnstar mewed. "I just want my kits to be happy and I see how happy she makes you, but you're old enough to make your own decisions. I know you'll do what is right." Dawnstar's confidence in Falconheart lifted his spirits. They shared a few small conversations along the way as they travelled through the gathering

hollow and soon reached the stone path that led to the Spirit Garden.

The closer they got to the Garden, the harder his heart began to pound. *What do I do? How to face StarClan? What are they going to say to me?* They slowly climbed the path and reached the top of the mountain. He looked over his shoulder, the view taking his breath away. *I could get used to this.*

"We will enter the Spirit Garden now. We will go down into the tunnel that will open into the cavern. Once there you will fall asleep and we will be greeted by StarClan." Falconheart just nodded and followed his mother into the tunnel. The sudden darkness was shocking, he was met with a sharp, cold breeze.

The darkness was almost overwhelming, he started to feel panic swelling inside his chest but Falconheart maintained his composure. At long last, a faint silver light opened up into a large cavern filled with flowers, in the center was a beautiful, star-shaped flower. "Here we are." Dawnstar spoke. "This is where we will communicate with StarClan."

Falconheart didn't speak, his eyes were focused intently on the flower before him. "So I just...fall asleep?" Dawnstar nodded. Falconheart and Dawnstar both laid down in front of the flower. Falconheart rested his paws on his chin and closed his eyes, breathing in the sweet scent of the flowers around him.

For a moment he didn't think it was working, then he opened his eyes and found himself in a strange forest. Stars shimmered overhead, brighter than he had ever seen. Wherever he was, it was much more comforting than the Dark Forest. He realized that beside him was his mother, Dawnstar seemed so comfortable in this forest, her eyes sparkled.

"Where are we?" Falconheart questioned her.

"This is StarClan's hunting grounds, they will come see us soon." Dawnstar sat down, gazing into the trees and waiting patiently. After a few moments, the leaves shuffled and out stepped for cats. One of them was a slender, pale gray she-cat with intense pale

green eyes. Beside her was a beautiful golden she-cat and a long-haired cream-colored she-cat with a sharp scowl on her face. *What's her problem?*

"Greetings, Dawnstar. Falconheart." The gray she-cat bowed her head. "It's a pleasure to see you tonight." Her green eyes purred with amusement. "You don't appear to know who we are, Falconheart. My name is Flowerstar, I led SunClan before your mother. This is Poppyfur and Honeywing, former medicine cats." *My sister was named after Honeywing.*

"It's a pleasure to meet you." Falconheart bowed his head respectfully.

"So your bad mistakes have finally caught up to you." The snide remark came from Poppyfur. "And you want *us* to fix it."

Falconheart flattened his ears. "Y-yeah."

"Oh come now, Poppyfur." Honeywing's voice was sweet and soothing. "He needs our help, and we *can* help." Honeywing stepped forward. "We've been concerned about the Dark Forest for a while now, we don't want them getting too strong."

"So what will we be doing?" Dawnstar questioned. "How do we stop an enemy that's already dead."

"It is possible for StarClan cats to die." Flowerstar explained. "We can sustain injuries, and in time every StarClan cat will fade. The same applies to Dark Forest cats. Though, we aren't going against *just* Falconclaw. If I know him, he will have many cats rallying behind him."

"Like Thornstar." Falconheart chimed in. "And Oakpelt."

"The name Oakpelt hasn't been mentioned by the cats of SunClan in a very long time." Poppyfur spoke. "Though I'm not surprised he's reared his ugly face again. We can probably assume that Echoheart is with them as well, and Thornstar's son."

"So what are we supposed to do?" Dawnstar questioned.

"We can't handle this alone," Flowerstar spoke. "We've enlisted another friend of ours to bring in some help."

After a few moments, Falconheart heard voices in the trees. "This way." A gentle voice spoke and from the trees appeared Nightheart, Riverstar and a beautiful silver tabby she-cat. Falconheart's eyes went wide and locked with Nightheart's.

"Dawnstar? Falconheart?" Riverstar looked incredibly confused and turned to the silver tabby. "Moonwhisker, what is going on here?" Moonwhisker quickly explained the situation with Falconclaw, then explained to the SunClan cats that Nightheart had also been under the training of a Dark Forest cat in Thornstar, and her mate Rabbitspring had been attacked.

"I was planning to bring Nightheart to the Spirit Garden tomorrow night." Riverstar added. "She told me what was going on, and I knew that I had to help her. I see that you had the same idea as me." Riverstar spoke to Dawnstar for a moment before turning to the StarClan cats. "What is our plan, anyway?

"Falconclaw is the mastermind behind all of this." Flowerstar continued. "We stop him and we stop the rest of them. Thornstar won't admit it but he's been controlled by Falconclaw his entire life. He's too much of a coward to do anything without his uncle's word."

"A cat like that almost destroyed my Clan." Riverstar lashed her tail. "Still, I'd like to sink my claws into his pelt."

Another, unfamiliar cat stepped out from the shadows. "I hate to break this up but you're wasting time." It was a large red-brown tabby tom. "I was near the Dark Forest border and I overheard them talking. They've got the SunClan medicine cat."

Falconheart's blood turned to ice. *Honeyfrost.*

Chapter 19

"What?" Falconheart's jaw dropped and fear flooded his gaze. "We need to get to her! Now!" The tom was clearly panicked about his sister. *I would be too.* Nightheart thought.

"I agree." Dawnstar said urgently.

"Then let's get going." Flowerstar spoke and the other StarClan cats agreed. "Follow us." The cats broke into a run and started running through the trees.

"Honeywing and myself won't be engaging in the fight." Moonwhisker explained during their run. "We don't have the fighting skills necessary."

"Poppyfur," Dawnstar looked at the old SunClan medicine cat. "Will you be helping?"
"I will." Poppyfur replied. "I still have fighting skills, even if I never really used them." They raced through the trees. Nightheart recognized this from her last run when Rabbitspring was in danger. They reached the Dark Forest border and they came to a stop. "Once we cross this border we will be in their territory." Poppyfur explained. "It's a disgusting place, but we need to be vigilant and find where she is."

"I know where she is." Falconheart growled. "There's a clearing where we would always train. I bet she's there."

"Then let's not waste anymore time." They continued their run and Nightheart's chest tightened at the thought of being in the Dark Forest again. *With any luck, this will be the last time.* It was Falconheart who took the lead, Nightheart knew that Falconclaw would train him in a different location than where Thornstar would train her to avoid them finding out until they needed to. *He's very determined. I didn't realize he wanted to break away from this as much as I did.*

"I can smell them." Falconheart announced. "We're getting closer." Suddenly, Falconheart skidded to a stop and the rest of their little battle party did the same.

"Would you look at that." The deep, manic voice came from Falconclaw. They had reached the clearing and he certainly wasn't alone. "The stars have ventured into the shadows." Nightheart stood in beside Riverstar looking over who was there. Behind Falconclaw stood Thornstar, Echoheart, Thrushclaw and a few cats that Nightheart had never seen before, including a red tabby she-cat, a pale gray tom and a dark brown tom with dark amber eyes.

Thornstar had Honeyfrost pinned to the forest floor, his claws placed over her throat. His amber eyes were dark and twisted. "Welcome, Dawnstar. I seem to have stumbled across a sacred piece of prey."

"Get your claws off my daughter you filthy mange pelt!" Dawnstar yowled, wanting to dive forward.

"I wouldn't move too quickly, Dawnstar." Echoheart snarled, walking around Thornstar and Honeyfrost. "I could *still* have my revenge on you and now...the daughter who took my life."

"Do anything and I'll wipe your existence from these stars." Nightheart had never seen Dawnstar so enraged, not even when Honeyfrost had been taken by Hornet. "You're nothing but a black mark on the Clan's history, Echoheart, and I plan on keeping it that way." Echoheart spat.

"Ah, Falconheart and Nightheart." Falconclaw spoke up again, stepping between Dawnstar and Thornstar and Echoheart. "So you think that you can just break away from the things we've taught you, may I remind you all that Falconheart *killed* Ashblaze. He has the violent tendencies of a killer just like me."

Falconheart tensed and hissed loudly. "I made a mistake, I lost control of myself and faced the guilt for it. Because unlike you I actually *feel* guilty about the lives I took."

Shockingly, Riverstar stepped forward. "Ashblaze would have been

honored to die to such a noble warrior. He was strong, he knew the risk." Falconheart looked gratefully at Riverstar.

Leaves rustled and Nightheart heard an unfamiliar voice in the darkness. "This way, and don't try anything." Two cats stepped out into the clearing and Nightheart noticed Falconheart's entire body going rigid. The two cats were a brown tabby and Sedgefern.

"Falconheart!" Sedgefern cried upon seeing him, The tom shoved Sedgefern forward.

"Quiet, kittypet." He spat and kept pushing her.

"Let her go, Oakpelt!" Falconheart yowled, his voice enraged.

"Show me your rage, Falconheart." Falconclaw stepped forward. "Show me the monster I made!"

Falconheart yowled in rage and leapt forward, tackling Falconclaw. The two broke into an intense fight. "Attack!" Dawnstar cried and Nightheart unsheathed her claws, going directly for Honeyfrost. As Nightheart ran towards her, Dawnstar was much faster and slammed Thornstar into the ground, allowing Honeyfrost to scramble away.

Echoheart was quickly going for Dawnstar, Nightheart leapt on her mother's shoulders and dragged her to the ground. She quickly battered her pelt, sinking her teeth into Echoheart's back. She tore through her tabby pelt, blood spraying across the forest floor. "Look at my big brave daughter." Echoheart snarled and raked her claws down Nightheart's belly.

Nightheart twisted away before she could get a nasty wound and jumped to her paws. "I should've known you'd never stop being a pest." Nightheart spat.

"I have nothing to lose now, but you have *everything* to lose." Echoheart leapt forward, too fast for Nightheart, Echoheart's paws hit Nightheart's chest, shoving her back into the hard ground. The breath rushed out from her lungs as Echoheart ran her claws down Nightheart's chest and belly. Nightheart winced and shoved her

hind paws deep into Echoheart's belly. Echoheart hissed sharply.

Nightheart reached up, sinking her claws into Echoheart's shoulder and pulling her close to her, sinking her teeth into Echoheart's throat. *She's already dead.* Nightheart tasted Echoheart's blood, it dripped down her muzzle until Echoheart forced herself away. Echoheart stumbled, falling backwards and letting out a choking noise. Blood poured from the wound on her throat and her body trembled.

I'm not done with her yet. This is for Featherfall! Nightheart attacked Echoheart once again, shoving her weakened form to the side and hissing loudly. "You are *nothing* Echoheart, nothing more than a nightmare I can ignore."

Suddenly, claws sank deep into Nightheart's flank and she was drug to the ground. Teeth sank into her shoulder and Nightheart was thrown to the side. Her had cracked against a rock and her vision blurred with plain. *Fox-dung!* She cursed and focused hard on what was in front of her. It was the ginger tabby she-cat, a cat Nightheart had never met.

"So you're the famous, Nightheart." She snarled, Nightheart noticed that she had a terrible wound twisting from her throat to under her belly. Nightheart shakily rose to her paws to face the Dark Forest cat.

"I don't even know who you are." Nightheart spat. "But you're here so clearly you're a vile, disgusting she-cat."

"My name is Russetflake, I was an AshClan cat just like you." She snarled, stepping in closer. "Until my Clan came under the leadership of a fool, I tried to kill her to save my Clan and I ended up here."

"You're evil. That's all there is to it." Nightheart declared and rushed into battle with the old she-cat. Nightheart sank her teeth and claws deep into her tabby pelt, shredding through her fur and flesh. Russetflake yowled in pain and retaliated, her claws raking down Nightheart's pelt.

Russetflake pinned Nightheart on her back, claws reared up to tear Nightheart's throat out. *No. This can't be the end!* Nightheart struggled to lash out, but in a flash of dark fur, Russetflake was thrown to the side. Nightheart jumped to her paws in alarm and saw a large, dark gray tom lashing out at the she-cat.

Eventually Russetflake scampered away into the darkness and the newcomer stood alone. "Thank you." Nightheart called out. She had never seen this cat before, but he had stars shimmering in his fur. "Who are you?"

"That doesn't matter." The tom replied in a low voice. "I saw this fight coming, and I saw that you needed help. I stood by Thornstar once, and it was the biggest mistake of my life. StarClan showed me mercy, but I never felt like I belonged. I'm just glad I could help you tonight, Nightheart. Fight on, warrior." In the blink of an eye, the dark gray tom vanished back into the shadows. *Whoever that was, he saved me.*

Nightheart shook her head and turned back to the others. The small battle in the Dark Forest was raging hard. Dawnstar had blood welling deep on her chest, blood spilling onto the floor. Falconheart was still locked in a violent fight with Falconclaw, the two of them nearly tearing each other apart.

Nightheart scanned the battle for Honeyfrost but couldn't spot her golden and white pelt. "Nightheart!" An unexpected voice called Nightheart's name, she turned around and gasped as she saw two cats racing towards her. One was Blackstorm and the other was Ashblaze, AshClan's former deputy.

"Moonwhisker told me that I needed to be here." Blackstorm explained urgently and looked over Nightheart. "You're hurt..."

"I'm fine." Nightheart hushed him. "You shouldn't be here, its dangerous."
"Where's Honeyfrost?" Blackstorm demanded, ignoring her.

"I don't know." Nightheart looked to Ashblaze. "Thank you for coming as well, it's good to see you."

"It's good to be back, now I'm going to defend my Clan once again." Ashblaze dove into the fight and Nightheart began searching for Honeyfrost.

"Stay back, Blackstorm." She told her brother. "You need--" There was a flash of tabby fur and suddenly Blackstorm was gone, she jumped and saw Oakpelt pinned Blackstorm to the ground. "What a treat StarClan has brought me." Oakpelt snarled, moving his claws to Blackstorm's throat, rage filled Nightheart. "A disgusting, codebreaking medicine cat to kill."

"If you hurt him I'll wipe you from these skies!" Nightheart declared and stepped forward. Oakpelt started pushing his claws deeper into Blackstorm's neck.

"Not so fast, Nightheart. Unless you want your brother's blood to cover the floor."

Nightheart tensed and bared her teeth. "Let. Him. Go."

Golden and white flashed before Nightheart's eyes and suddenly Honeyfrost was on Oakpelt's back, battering at his spine. Nightheart had to quickly react, but Oakpelt was faster. He reared up on his hind legs and shook Honeyfrost off.

She fell to the ground and before she could even move, Oakpelt whirled around and slashed his claws across Honeyfrost's throat. "No!" Blackstom cried, his yowl splitting through the sounds of battle. Nightheart charged forward, her blood roaring in her ears but someone was faster.

Falconheart tore past her and slammed Oakpelt into the ground. "You'll pay for that!" He howled and Nightheart was shaken by the rage in Falconheart's voice. *He doesn't even look the same.* Falconheart moved like a serpent, his muzzle going to Oakpelt like he was mouse. He sank his teeth deep into Oakpelt's throat and raked his claws down Oakpelt's chest, blood pouring from both wounds.

Falconheart stepped back, snarling with his muzzle covered in blood. Oakpelt had genuine shock in his eyes. Blood trickled from

his lips and his dark amber eyes glazed over and in the blink of an eye, Oakpelt vanished. Falconheart quickly ran to Honeyfrost's side where Blackstorm already had his paws over the wound.

Honeyfrost wasn't moving, Nightheart joined them. "Come on, Honeyfrost." Nightheart mewed. "You're the cat who defeated Nightheart, you can't let yourself be killed yet."

Honeyfrost's eyes fluttered open slowly. "Go..." She breathed out. "I'll be okay...I'll wake up and Pebblestep...will care for me." She looked around the three cats. "The four of us...this...is our destiny." Honeyfrost flashed a loving glance at each of the three cats around her before she faded away, returning to the waking world.

"Our destiny?" Falconheart echoed and looked at Nightheart, then to Blackstorm. "The four of us."

"Moonwhisker mentioned a prophecy to me." Blackstorm spoke up. "But she never told me all the details. *The choices of the brave, and the mistakes of the frightened, will shape the forest with unsteady paws and claws that rain blood.*" Nightheart felt a chill at Blackstorm's words.

The fight continued, and Falconclaw was wrestling with Ashblaze who had taken over for Falconheart. *This isn't over.* She raised her voice. "Then let's fulfill our destiny."

Chapter 20

Falconheart felt a new energy surging through his body. Nightheart stood at his side with Blackstorm just behind them. *We have a destiny together.* There was a time when Falconheart and Nightheart hated each other, she had given him the scar on his nose from such a foolish mistake. Falconheart had never really known Blackstorm, but he knew of the tom's love for his sister. When Honeyfrost was injured, Blackstorm was the first to her side. *I'm glad my sister was able to feel such love. Now it's time to save my own.* Falconheart bared his teeth as he saw Ashblaze fighting with Falconclaw. *That's my fight, but thank you Ashblaze.*

"Lets go!" Falconheart yowled and they charged forward. With claws extended, Falconheart slammed into Falconclaw. He slashed his claws down Falconclaw's pelt and jumped back, standing beside Ashblaze, before Falconclaw could attack again.

"You got it from here?" Ashblaze questioned.

Falconheart nodded and looked to Ashblaze, this cat had caused him so much guilt. "Ashblaze, before you go--"
"Don't apologize, Falconheart." Ashbalze shook his head. "I took one of your mother's lives, you had every right to do what you did. I don't blame you, make it up to me by defeating this worthless piece of crowfood."
"Big talk coming from a cat who's half-rogue." Falconclaw spat but Ashblaze ignored him and ran to assist Riverstar.

"Echoheart has been defeated." Falconheart declared, "Oakpelt has been wiped from existence."
"I never cared about them." Falconclaw snarled. "I'm a *killer*, Falconheart when will you learn that? Nothing in life has ever given me more pleasure than taking a life. You would never understand the rush I feel, the *itch* I feel to kill. It drove me mad as a young apprentice, the things I did you give you *nightmares.*" His eyes were crazed. *He's gotten good at keeping it together, but now he can't.*

"That's all you become when this battle is over, is a *nightmare*. A nightmare I'll forget."

"Whatever happens here," Falconclaw stepped forward. "Whether I die or live, I'm taking you with me!" Falconclaw shot forward, a blur of pale brown fur. He shoved Falconheart to the ground and battered at his chest. He wasn't fighting like a warrior, he was fighting like a bloodthirsty rogue.

Falconheart had already killed Oakpelt, and he felt no regret for it, not after what he had done to Honeyfrost. Falconheart slashed his claws across Falconclaw's already scarred face. He hissed in pain but didn't let up his assault. Falconheart attacked face, dragging his claws across Falconclaw's eyes. The Dark Forest tom pulled back before Falconheart could do serious damage, but he shook the blood from his face.

In that moment, Falconheart attacked again. He jumped onto Falconclaw's back and knocked him off balance. Falconheart jumped off gracefully and turned on his paws, slashing his claws down Falconclaw's belly. Blood poured from the wounds, but he still wasn't down. Falconclaw yowled in rage and shot forward, keeping low to the ground.

Before Falconheart could react, Falconclaw was underneath him and stood up, forcing Falconheart off his paws and onto his side. Falconheart quickly flipped onto his belly before Falconclaw could kill him. Falconclaw still attacked, sinking his teeth into Falconheart's scruff and flinging him against a tree. Falconheart grit his teeth from the pain but rose to his paws once again.

Despite his shredded and bloody pelt, Falconclaw still had the rage of battle deep in his eyes. Falconheart was starting to feel the exhaustion and pain of his wounds. *I can't give up now. Not when there's so many cats depending on me to kill him.* Falconheart yowled and attacked again. Falconclaw was prepared for his attack and braced himself, Falconheart was unable to knock him over.

Falconclaw sank his claws into Falconheart's spine and shoved him into the ground, shredding along his back. Falconheart hissed in pain, and let his body go limp. He heard a snicker from Falconclaw

and the tom made a grave mistake, thinking Falconheart was defeated.

As he removed his paw from Falconheart's body, he leapt to his paws and tackled Falconclaw, seeing a flash of surprise in his eyes. He attacked Falconclaw with such force that together they tumbled down a small hill, separating themselves from the rest of the fight.

"I've taught you well." Falconclaw sneered, shoving Falconheart away and rising to his paws.

"You taught me how to be a killer." Falconheart growled. "The cats I love taught me how to be a *warrior.* Something you could never hope to be."

"You'd be nothing without me!"

Falconheart sneered, suddenly feeling energy flow through his body. "You're right, I wouldn't be who I am without you. I would still be an arrogant, stupid apprentice. I'm glad I trained under you, but now it's time for the apprentice to teach his mentor something." He shot forward, wondering where this newfound energy came from.

Falconheart and Falconclaw collided once again, a flurry of claws, teeth and blood spraying the Dark Forest floor. Falconheart reared up on his hind legs, bringing his paw down heavy on Falconclaw's head. He dropped to the ground, eyes dazed. *Now!* Falconheart yowled in rage and raked his claws across Falconclaw's throat, blood sprayed out from the wound, covering Falconheart's chest and paws. "I won." Falconheart breathed out.

Falconclaw's body twitched and his eyes rested on Falconheart, he let out a choked laughter. "Remember...Falconheart." He grit his teeth, the look in his eyes drove fear deep into Falconheart's heart. "I'll always be a part of you." Falconclaw's head dropped and the light faded from his eyes and just as with Oakpelt, his body faded away, disappearing forever. Falconheart breathed out a sigh of exhaustion as his energy faded away, he lifted his paw and noticed Falconclaw's blood dripping from his claws, like tiny raindrops. *Claws that rain blood.*

Falconclaw is gone forever. He'll never hurt another cat again. Falconheart could hear the battle continuing, he climbed back up the hill, his wounds starting to ache. The Dark Forest cats were overwhelmed, Falconclaw hadn't brought enough backup. Echoheart and the ginger tabby were gone. The pale gray tom was bleeding profusely from several wounds as he fought Ashblaze.

Poppyfur and Riverstar had a tom cornered against a tree, bleeding from wounds on his chest. "This is the life you chose, Branchfur. Remember this."

"You are a disgusting she-cat, Poppyfur!" Branchfur lashed out with his claws, but didn't strike either of the two she-cats. "All SunClan medicine cats are codebreaking filth! Just like Honeyfrost and Blackstorm!"

"What about Blackstorm?" The fur along Riverstar's spine rose.

"Ask him yourself." Branchfur spat and broke away from them, vanishing into the Dark Forest. Riverstar seemed confused, she looked at Poppyfur.

"What about Blackstorm and Honeyfrost?"

Poppyfur sighed. "Unfortunately, Branchfur is right. It's best if you ask Blackstorm yourself. Just don't judge him too harshly, allow himself to explain, Riverstar."

I can't worry about that now. Falconheart searched for Sedgefern, the gray she-cat was chasing off Thrushclaw with only minor wounds on her. Meanwhile, Dawnstar and Flowerstar were fighting Thornstar.

Dawnstar bled heavily from a wound on neck, looking slightly dazed. Falconheart quickly started running to his mother's side. He had the secret to ending this fight. Falconheart broke between Flowerstar and Dawnstar and slammed Thornstar into the ground. "Guess what?" He spat into his ear. "Falconclaw is *dead.*"

"What?" Thornstar shoved Falconheart off and scrambled backwards. "He's...dead?"

"I killed him, he's *never* coming back." There was a storm of conflicted emotions in Thornstar's eyes.

Flowerstar stepped forward. "This is your chance, Thornstar." She spoke up. "You're finally free of Falconclaw's grip on you. Turn and leave."

Thornstar hissed, but he didn't attack. "What do you know Flowerstar?"

"I know the Thornstar I loved is still in there somewhere, it may be too late but you can turn and run now. Live out the rest of your days in the Dark Forest without Falconclaw."

"You know *nothing* about me." He looked around. "But I know when I'm defeated." Thornstar turned and ran into the shadows. The other Dark Forest warriors quickly noticed that Thornstar was running, and many of them were gone. Thrushclaw followed his father and the gray tom followed as well and soon, only the living and StarClan cats remained.

"You've done well, Falconheart." Flowerstar spoke. "You have defeated a great evil, one that nearly claimed my own life." Falconheart was honored to have the old leader's praise, but his heart dropped when he saw Dawnstar's collapse.

"Dawnstar!" Falconheart cried and ran to his mother's side. "Wake up!" He cried. "Return to the Spirit Garden, please!" Dawnstar looked at Falconheart for a moment, her green eyes bursting with love, then she faded away.

"She might lose a life," Flowerstar assured him. "But she will be okay, she has plenty of lives remaining." The StarClan cats began to gather, none of them seemed seriously wounded, but Falconheart could feel his own words burning. Nightheart had several wounds as well, but none of them were life threatening. "We should return to StarClan." She suggested.

"I agree." Poppyfur nodded. "I despise this place." As they padded through the Dark Forest and eventually reached the StarClan border, crossing into the realm of stars, Falconheart looked over his

shoulder. In this moment he prayed that he would never have to see the Dark Forest again.

Honeywing and Moonwhisker quickly reconvened with the StarClan and living cats. "Are you alright? Where's Honeyfrost and Dawnstar?"

"Injured, both should be awake in the real world." Flowerstar explained and looked at the living cats. "You all should do the same. Dawnstar will need help returning to SunClan territory."

"Remember what you all have done here today." Honeywing raised her voice. "You three, along with Honeyfrost, have fulfilled a prophecy tonight."

"I still don't understand what that prophecy means." Nightheart mewed. "What did we fifull."

"You and Falconheart made a mistake because you was scared that you would not be able to serve your Clan well. Blackstorm and Honeyfrost had to make a choice, and they made the right choice despite how hard and how much pain that choice would bring. Together, you four have shaped the forest into a safer one. The cats of Dark Forest won't be eager to try and traincats again, they know that StarClan will retaliate.

"What you've done tonight will protect future cats in a way that they will never know, but you will. You are amazing cats, together you have shaped the future of not only SunClan and AshClan, but LichenClan and MoonClan as well. I hope you understand this."

"I do." Falconheart spoke up. "Thank you, for helping us."

"It's what I do best." Honeywing stepped forward. "Now return to your Clans. Be strong, and help guide them into a brighter future." She rested her muzzle on Falconheart's and the world around him faded away. He opened his eyes and was back in the Spirit Garden, beside him was Dawnstar, she sat up and gazed at the star-shaped flower.

"Are you alright?" Falconheart questioned, rushing to his mother's

side.

"I lost a life," She sighed but her green eyes sparkled. "But it was worth it, knowing that my son will sleep safely now."

"We should get home." Falconheart stood up. "Are you okay to travel?"

"Yes, Falconheart." Dawnstar stood up and the two of them started the long walk home. "I'm so proud of you, you fought like a true warrior tonight and I couldn't be happier. You have grown into such an amazing cat."

"Thank you." Falconheart purred. "I learned from the best."

With that, the two of them finally returned to their home in SunClan and they prepared to move on from the terrible battle.

Chapter 21

Honeyfrost opened her eyes, she was no longer in the Dark Forest, dying, but in the medicine cat den. Her throat ached and she placed a paw where her wound had been. She came away with blood on her paw but her wound wasn't as bad as it had been in the Dark Forest. It was still night in the forest, Pebblestep was sleeping silently as was Briarrose and the kits.

Honeyfrost rose to her paws and shakily walked over to the herb store. She planned on treating herself, but her movements woke Pebblestep. Her mentor lifted her head and blinked sleepily. "Honeyfrost?" Her blue eyes suddenly widened when she saw Honeyfrost's throat. "What in the name of StarClan happened to you?" She jumped to her paws and made Honeyfrost sit down.

"It's a long story." Honeyfrost choked out, speaking caused her too much pain.

"Just let me treat you, don't talk." Pebblestep mewed sternly and started treating Honeyfrost's wound. After a few moments of applying marigold and cobwebs, the wound was dressed and she stepped back. "So what happened?"

Honeyfrost started quickly explaining what happened, the whole situation with Falconheart and Nightheart training in the Dark Forest and how Dawnstar had taken Falconheart to the Spirit Garden to seek guidance from StarClan and they led an attack on the Dark Forest.

"I was sleeping when I woke up in the Dark Forest and was attacked by Thornstar. He dragged me into the battle and threatened to kill me. I nearly got away when the battle began but an old warrior named Oakpelt did this to me, I woke up and left."

"Wow." Pebblestep stared in shock at Honeyfrost's story. "Are the other's okay?"

"I hope so." Honeyfrost sighed. "I left before the battle was over." She thought for a moment, remembering what she had told Blackstorm, Nightheart and Falconheart before she woke up. *This is our destiny.* She thought. "Did you know about the prophecy?"

Pebblestep seemed surprised by the question but nodded. "Yes, I knew about it. I didn't know when the right time to tell you was. I'm assuming Honeywing told you?"

Honeyfrost nodded. "She told me a few moons ago, and I told Falconheart, Blackstorm and Nightheart about it before I woke. I believe that this is our moment, this is when the prophecy will be fulfilled. Even if I don't fully understand it. "

"I think you're right." Pebblestep rested her tail on Honeyfrost's shoulder. "Decoding prophecies is part of the job we have as medicine cats. You'll face many more in your time, I'm sure, though you may not always be the subject of them."

Honeyfrost rested her eyes on the four kits sleeping safely at Briarrose's belly. "No," She sighed happily. "But I'm okay with that, it's time for different cats to shine and I believe it's the four of them."

Honeyfrost was unable to fall back asleep, not knowing what was going on in the Dark Forest. She stayed awake and eventually dawn came. She hoped that her Clanmates wouldn't notice the wound on her neck. It wasn't a deep or deadly wound, but it would still bring up questions if anyone saw it.

At long last, just past dawn Falconheart and Dawnstar returned. Honeyfrost sprinted from the medicine cat den to her mother and brother. "You're back!" She exclaimed. "Are you alright?"

"Yes," Dawnstar mewed. In an instant, Falconheart was looking at the wound on her neck.

"Are *you* okay?" He questioned.

"I'm fine, Falconheart." Honeyfrost assured him.

"I need to find Sedgefern." He said, once Falconheart had made sure

that Honeyfrost was alright.

"Follow me," Dawnstar brushed her tail along Honeyfrost's pelt. Honeyfrost followed her mother, noticing that Dawnstar had several healed wounds, including one on her throat. They reached the leader's den and both of them sat down.

"So what happened?"

"Falconheart killed Falconclaw and the rest of the Dark Forest warriors fled, defeated." Dawnstar held her high proud. "And I don't think they would have been able to do without your encouragement, your words guided your brother to victory."

Honeyfrost felt warmed, knowing she had helped. "It's getting a little old, isn't it. I keep getting held hostage."

"Yes, but this time they severely underestimated you. You may be a medicine cat, but you defeated a great evil. You saved many lives, not just your own when you defeated Echoheart. I know it's not something that you wanted to do, but taking lives of dangerous cats is something that has to be done sometimes. When I killed Thornstar I struggled with it for a while, I didn't like taking a life but Thornstar was a threat to the forest."

Honeyfrost pressed against her mother. "Thank you, but I still don't feel like taking any more lives any time soon."

"And that's just fine." Dawnstar purred loudly.

"What happened to you?" Honeyfrost question, giving her wound a sniff.

"Unfortunately Thornstar got a few too many wounds on me. I collapsed in the Dark Forest and lost a life."

"You lost a life?" Honeyfrost tensed. "Are you alright?"

"It's fine, Honeyfrost." Dawnstar assured her. "I still have six lives remaining. I don't plan on dying anytime soon."

"Good." Honeyfrost purred loudly. "I want to serve as your medicine

cat for as long as I can."

"I hope so." Dawnstar rested her chin on Honeyfrost's head. "Now if you don't mind, I'd like to get some sleep. I didn't do much of that last night." Honeyfrost agreed and left her mother to get some sleep. She looked into the sky, and she felt something tugging her outside of camp. She couldn't explain it, but it felt like her paws started moving on her own. Honeyfrost started quickly walking outside of camp and into the forest. Her heart led her towards the AshClan border, and she stopped once she saw a figure sitting by the river.

It was Blackstorm, staring into the river's surface. *He doesn't know I'm okay yet.* "Hey there, stranger." She spoke and Blackstorm jumped slightly, looking up from his own reflection.

"Honeyfrost!" Blackstorm ran to the border, not daring to cross it. "You're alright! I'm so glad to see you're alright! I was so scared."

"I know." Honeyfrost sighed and approached the border. "I don't know what brought me here, but I'm glad I could see you."
"I'm glad too." Blackstorm looked like he wanted to cross the border and for a moment Honeyfrost wanted him to. She wanted to see him, to press and nuzzle against him like she did in the past. *There's no time for that now.* "I--" Blackstorm stammered. "I'm glad your brother is alright too, he did something amazing."
"Nightheart did too." Honeyfrost responded. "I hope she's doing well. She protected me when Echoheart captured me. She's a great warrior."

"She is." Blackstorm's eyes sparkled. "So is Falconheart." He sat down and looked into the river again. "Hard to believe all four of us were involved in that prophecy."

"We have a lot in common." Honeyfrost thought. "Two of us drove to being medicine cats, two training in the Dark Forest. Two falling in love with each other." She glanced at hm. "It was destiny who brought us together."
"Destiny is cruel." Blackstorm sighed.

"But, we're still close." Honeyfrost assured him. "And honestly," she gazed up towards the sky. "I don't think I'd have it any other way."

Blackstorm looked at Honeyfrost, his eyes soft. "I don't either. I'm my Clan's medicine cat, I have a great sister." He met Honeyfrost's gaze, the look in his eyes warmed her heart. She felt so close to him, no matter how far apart the two of them had to be. "And I have a best friend."

"You always will." Honeyfrost purred loudly. "I promise."

Chapter 22

Nightheart opened her eyes, quickly realizing she was back in the warrior's den. Her body ached painfully from the wounds that she had received. She quickly looked over her pelt, it was wet with blood but the wounds didn't seem to translate over as severe. Nightherat rose to her paws and quickly raced over to Blackstorm's den before any of her Clanmates, especially Rabbitspring, noticed.

NIghtheart stepped into Blackstorm's den to see that he was awake as well. He stood up and looked at his sister. "Are you alright?"
"I think so." She replied and padded up to her brother. "I just want to make sure." She sat down as Blackstorm looked over her pelt.

"Your wounds aren't bad, but could use some treatment."
Blackstorm mewed and started quickly treating her wounds.

"I'm finding it hard to wrap my brain around everything that happened." Nightheart admitted. "That entire battle took place while we slept." She chuckled to herself. "I've trained there before, but this felt so different."

"I just hope Honeyfrost is alright." Blackstorm sighed.

"I'm sure she will be, Blackstorm." Nightheart nudged him. "She's a tough cat, she's gone through a lot and come out on top everytime."

"You're right." Blackstorm purred gently. "I know she's strong, stronger than I'll ever be."

"Don't see yourself short." Nightheart rose to her paws. "I should get out there, I suppose. It's weird knowing that our Clanmates will probably never know what we did last night."

"It's better that they don't." Blackstorm pointed out. "We don't want our Clanmates terrified to sleep."

Nightheart heard pawsteps approaching the medicine cat den, she

turned around to see Riverstar standing in the den, looking over the two of them. "I'm glad to see the two of you standing, did you get your wounds treated?" She questioned Nightheart who gave her a nod. "Good."
"Do you have any wounds, Riverstar?" Blackstorm stood up and approached the leader, giving her pelt a sniff.

"Not really." Riverstar mewed. "I'm doing alright, if I have any pain later I'll come to you." Blackstorm nodded and returned to his herb store. "May I speak with you for a moment, Nightheart?"

"Of course." Nightheart looked at Blackstorm. "I'll come check in with you later." Blackstorm waved his tail to show he heard her and Nightheart and Riverstar stepped out of the medicine cat den and padded to the leader's den. Once inside, the two of them sat down and faced each other. "What did you want to talk about?"
"I wanted to take a moment to check up on you. You've faced a lot in your young life, I know that you and Blackstorm have essentially grown up alone. Echoheart never wanted the two of you, and once Crowfoot realized he had been used, and unfortunately that affected how he felt about you two."

"I don't really blame Crowfoot." Nightheart admitted. "Echoheart used him and we were the result of it. It would have been nice to have a supportive father, but I can't force him to love us if he doesn't."

"I know Crowfoot cares for you two, he's just not good at showing it." Riverstar sighed. "My father was very similar in that manner." She chuckled. "Regardless of all that, however, you have turned into one of AshClan's most loyal warriors. I've never been good at showing you two just how proud of you I am.

"You may have made a mistake in training under Thornstar but tonight you proved that you're stronger than you were when you were an apprentice. You fought bravely and you stood above the evil. You defeated your mother and another Dark Forest cat. I know that many cats didn't know how to feel about you or your brother but you have certainly made your way into this Clan.

"Cats work with you, they're proud to call you their Clanmates,

you've even fallen in love haven't you?" Nightheart thought of Rabbitspring fondly for a moment. "My point is, Nightheart, is that you are an incredible warrior and I am proud of you. I never had kits of my own, but if I did I would want them to be just like you and Blackstorm. I am honored to call you Clanmates, and even more honored to call you my kin."

Nightheart felt overwhelmed by Riverstar's praise, to have such words said to her by her Clan leader. "Thank you, Riverstar." Nightheart bowed her head. "That means more than you know, thank you."
Riverstar rested her muzzle on Nightheart's forehead. "I'm eager to see what you will bring AshClan next. I honestly could see you leading this Clan someday. You have the heart of a leader."
Nightheart purred. "I'd love to lead this Clan, but I don't feel like losing you anytime soon, Riverstar."
"Good because I don't feel like dying anytime soon." She purred with amusement and started walking Nightheart out of her den. Together they noticed Rabbitspring was awake and talking to Haresong. "Now, I think you should give your time to someone else." Riverstar nudged Nightheart forward.

Nightheart padded across camp, her heart swelling as she saw Rabbitspring. *There's something I need to tell her.* Nightheart reached Rabbitspring who very quickly scented herbs on her pelt. "You smell like herbs? Did something happen?" She looked over Nightheart's pelt, noticing the wounds on her. "You're hurt! What happened?"
"Quiet," Nightheart mewed gently. "Follow me." Nightheart guided Rabbitspring into the pine trees, leading her to the place where Nightheart first admitted her feelings for Rabbitspring. "I told Riverstar about my training with Thornstar." She began.

"And?"

"She was planning on taking me to the Spirit Garden to talk to StarClan, but last night we were visited by Moonwhisker. She took us to where Honeywing, Poppyfur, Dawnstar and Falconheart were waiting." Rabbitspring's eyes widened. "We led an attack on the Dark Forest and Falconheart killed Falconclaw, ending the fight and disbanding Falconclaw's little group. Honeyfrost was almost killed, but she told us that me, Blackstorm, her and Falconheart were all

the subjects of prophecy that we fulfilled last night."

"Wow." Rabbitspring breathed out. "I'm sorry you had to go through that."

Nightheart shook her head. "We're all the better for it, trust me." Nightheart cleared her throat. "But there's something I wanted to tell you," She took a deep breath. "Rabbitspring, for the past four moons you have been everything to me. You've cared for me, encouraged me and made me the happiest she-cat in the entire forest." Rabbitspring's eyes sparkled. "I've said this before but I want to spend the rest of my life with you at my side." She touched her muzzle to Rabbitspring's. "Rabbitspring, I love you."

Rabbitspring's brief hesitation made Nightheart freeze for a moment, terrified she had messed everything up. "I love you too, Nightheart." She purred. The words made Nightheart feel like she could take on the entire forest. *She's everything I need. With her at my side, the future is brighter than the sun.*

Chapter 23

Falconheart and Dawnstar arrived in SunClan camp not too long after dawn. They were both exhausted, but Falconheart had several things to take care of before getting some rest. His eyes scanned the camp searching for either Honeyfrost or Sedgefern. He finally spotted Honeyfrost as she sprinted from the medicine cat den to them. "You're back!" She exclaimed, eyes filled with concern and love.

"Yes." Dawnstar replied but Falconheart was focused intently on the wound across Honeyfrost's neck. It was covered in a layer of marigold and cobwebs, but if she was running around then surely she was okay?

"Are *you* okay?" Falconheart questioned, he had to be sure that his sister was okay.

"I'm fine, Falconheart." Honeyfrost promised and the bright light in her eyes confirmed that. He breathed out a sigh of relief, and there was something else he had to do, someone else had to check up on. He also knew that Dawnstar wanted to talk to Honeyfrost.

"I need to find Sedgefern." Falconheart announced and started searching for her. She didn't have many wounds during the fight but he had to make sure that she was alright. His paws raced across the camp, desperately trying to find her.

"Woah there," Lionclaw chuckled. "Where's the fire?" He then looked over Falconheart's pelt, noticing the wounds that he still bore from the fight. "What in the name of StarClan happened to you?"

"It's a long story," Falconheart mewed. "I'm sure my mother can explain it better than I can."

"Well, are you alright at least?" Lionclaw's amber eyes betrayed concern. "You seem antsy."
"Have you seen Sedgefern?" He questioned. "I need to tell her

something important."

Lionclaw's eyes softened. "Have you found the right time?"

Falconheart's chest ached. "Yeah," He purred. "I think I have."

"Well Cinderflame scheduled her to the morning patrol," Lionclaw explained and Falconheart's felt his heart drop to his paws. "But, I'll see if I can't take her place."

"Thank you so much." Falconheart purred loudly. "I'll go find her." Leaving his father behind, Falconheart continued his search for Sedgefern. He finally spotted Dovepool and Petalbreeze talking over the fresh-kill pile. *They should know.*

"Hey," He called to them. "Do you know where Sedgefern is?"

Dovepool eyed him suspiciously. "Why do you want to know?" Petalbreeze rested her tail on Dovepool's pelt.

"Calm down," Petalbreeze soothed her sister. "Just look at him, he's *dying* to talk to her." Petalbreeze purred. "She's giving the queens some prey."

"Thank you." Falconheart thanked her quickly and padded swiftly into the nursery where Sedgefern was playing with Maplekit and Bramblekit while Squirreltail, Heatherflight and Fawnheart ate their prey. *She's great with kits.* Falconheart thought fondly. He could see himself having kits with Sedgefern, but first he had to talk to her and hope that she didn't completely reject him.

"Good morning." He mewed, Sedgefern quickly turned and looked up from Maplekit and Bramblekit. He could tell by the exhaustion in her eyes that she hadn't really slept since she returned from the Dark Forest. "Having fun?"

"Yeah," Sedgefern stood up. "Are you--did you--sleep well?" She stammered, clearly wanting to ask if he was okay. Falconheart noticed Fawnheart giving him a judgemental stare.

"Maybe you two should go and talk." Fawnheart rose to her paws and swept up Maplekit and Brambelkit with her tail. She gave

Falconheart an encouraging nod. "Go on you two."

"Let's go." Falconheart motioned with his head and walked out of the nursery with Sedgefern.

"I need to go on patrol soon--"

"Don't worry about it, my father said he would cover it for you." Falconheart explained quickly. "I really need to talk to you, Sedgefern."

"Alright." Sedgefern agreed and the two of them ventured out a short distance away from camp and sat down underneath the shade of the trees.

"First of all, I want to apologize for getting you involved in the Dark Forest, you shouldn't have had to face that."

"I'm glad I was there." Sedgefern countered. "Now you don't have to worry about that any more, you can sleep peacefully. That's all that matters to me, Falconheart. I want nothing more than to see you happy, and I hope that can happen now."

Falconheart was hypnotized by the sweet look in Sedgefern's eyes. *I'm so crazy about her. I have to tell her now.* "Sedgefern," He began. "You're right, I can sleep better now and I don't have to be scared of my dreams, but I don't think I can be happy. Not yet."

Sedgefern looked at him, concerned. "What? Why not?"

"Because, I've been hiding from what I really want, what will *really* make me happy. I've been hiding it because I've been scared, but now I don't have to be." Falconheart took a deep breath. "Sedgefern, what's really going to make me happy is *you.*" Sedgefern just blinked. "I've been waiting so long to say this, but I want you by my side always. Whether it's fighting, hunting or sleeping I want you at my side. I want every day from this moment on to have you in it, not just my best friend but my mate. I want a future with you, kits and all. I want *you* Sedgefern, I've never wanted something so badly."

Sedgefern stared at Falconheart, her eyes rampaging with shock.

Falconheart held his breath, deep down he knew what Sedgefern would say but he was also terrified that she didn't actually care about him the same way. "Falconheart I--" She began, her voice breaking. Suddenly she stepped forward and buried her muzzle deep in Falconheart's pelt. "Falconheart I want that too, I've wanted it for so long."

"No matter what the future brings, battles, sickness, anything, I know I'll be able to get through it as long as I have you. I love you Sedgefern."

"I love you too, Falconheart." Sedgefern breathed out and the two of them shared a very long moment together. Falconheart started to think about his life, everything that happened. In his mind flashed when he was a kit and nearly got killed by an adder, and later when he tried to pick a fight with Nightheart. *I was so stupid.* He remembered his fight with Honeyfrost, and eventually making up.

He remembered the first time he met Falconclaw, the first time he faced off against Echoheart. He remembered the painful moments like Pikepaw and Sorrelpaw's deaths. Moments of strength for his Clan like Flashtail becoming a warrior. He thought about the journey, travelling into an unknown world to find a new home. He fought with Nightheart, he saved Nightheart, he saved Honeyfrost and killed Hornet. He killed Ashblaze and he killed Falconclaw.

Moments of his whole life moved through his mind, and in all of them there was Sedgefern. She encouraged him, fueled his ego and brought him back from the brink of darkness. *I can't help but be happy with my life so far.* He thought and looked lovingly at Sedgefern, breathing in her sweet scent. *And it's only just beginning.*

Falconheart and Sedgefern shared a long moment together, no words necessary. He loved her, and he knew that his life would be perfect. Together they returned to camp with their tails intertwined and all that saw them knew what they were now. Falconheart and Sedgefern went about their days but everything felt so much more perfect, so incredible.

As night arrived, Falconheart and Sedgefern headed to the warrior's den. Before he stepped inside the den, he looked up at the sun

falling behind the mountains. He took a deep breath, happiness swelling inside of him as the final lights of the day hid behind the mountains, and when the sun came up it would be time for a whole new era for SunClan.

Special Thanks

Even though I finished this book a few months ago, I never thought this moment would come. I began writing *Dawnstar's Trouble* about 8 years ago and I never thought I would finish that book let alone an entire series of books.

So I wanted to take this moment, as we read the final moments of Falconheart, Honeyfrost, Nightheart and Blackstorm to say thank you. Thank you to everyone who has read the chapters I put out for you, thank you for the comments, votes and everything else. Every single interaction makes me so happy and I'm glad I can bring entertainment to people.

I'd like to thank Firespring for being one of my most eager fans even if we haven't spoken in a minute, your questions have given me a lot of inspiration. I'd like to thank the Warriors Fan Made Clans wiki for allowing a place to keep all of my many characters organized.

I'd like to thank my best friend, Axa, for always being the biggest encouragement in my life. Without her, I wouldn't be able to do half the things I do.

I want to remind everyone that this is not the end, even if it seems like this. Honeyfrost, Faloncheart, Blackstorm and Nightheart's story is over, and it is time for a new story coming soon in Waging War, the next series.

I'm currently working on the first book, *Beyond the Mountains,* and I am excited to bring it to you along with eventually stories like *AshClan's Future* and *Falconclaw's Rage.* I have so much planned still, even if my work has slowed. Warriors will never leave my heart and neither will these characters.

I hope to see all of you across my next books and again, thank you so much for taking the time to read my books.

May StarClan light your paths.